

Sunday, June 17th. 2021. Trinity 4

Wisdom 1. 13-15, 23-24, Psalm 30, Mark 5. 21-43

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

When I had my flat in Amersham, I decided to have the lounge redecorated. I had bought a wallpaper, which it was obvious that my mum didn't like! I came back from school one day, when half of the room had been repapered. Disaster! The room looked completely dead. Mum was right, as usual! I thought that I had better let the man finish it, stuck it for a while and then had it redone in a more cheerful colour.

We talk about things being deadly when they are dull and lacking in life. We once came out of church in St. Andrews, and a lady said to me, "Wasn't that deadly!" Oh dear! And we can talk about being bored to death.

In today's reading from Wisdom, God is seen as not being the author of death, that is, eternal death. His creation and all that conforms to his will is meant for life and immortality.

The Bible generally recognises that we are mortal. Look at Psalm 144: 'O Lord, what are mortals that you should consider them; mere human beings, that you should take thought for them? They are like a breath of wind; their days pass away like a shadow.'

We all die eventually. But there was the idea that death meant joining the departed in the underworld, a dreary, meaningless existence, where one was cut off from the "land of the living" and from the presence of God. That was the fear.

In Psalm 30, the psalmist exclaims: 'You brought me up, O Lord, from the dead; you restored me to life from among those that go down to the Pit.' The psalmist will praise God, as he has been raised from illness and from the rejoicing of his enemies at his misfortune. He looks back on his trouble and appeals to God that, as the dead cannot praise God, his passing into the Pit would be of no benefit to God: 'What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you or declare your faithfulness?'

There is also the idea that there is a connection between sin and death. Sin is disobedience and it leads to being cut off from God. So, sin means death and conforming to God's will means life. In Deuteronomy it says: 'Choose life, so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God and obeying him.'

The fear of being cut off from God can be seen in this hymn:

Abide with me from morn till eve, for without thee I cannot live; abide with me when night is nigh, for without thee I dare not die. Yet, there is clear teaching that God takes no pleasure even in the death of the wicked, as seen in the absolution in the Prayer Book:

‘Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live.’

The Gospel contains two interwoven healing miracles. In the first account, it is difficult to see whether the author intended it to be a healing at the point of death or a bringing back to life one who has died. The point of the story is to demonstrate the power of Jesus over life and death.

The second account of the healing of a woman with a flow of blood is also an example of the power of Jesus to heal. Faith seems to account for her action and is mentioned at the end as the reason for her cure. But it was accomplished by the power of Jesus. The woman’s faith allows the power of Jesus to be effective.

Faith, ‘only believe’ is stressed also in the healing of Jairus’ daughter, but, in this case, it is not the faith of the one being healed, but that of a third party, the father.

In both cases, the story is one of restoration and resurrection. Jesus restores Jairus’ daughter and the woman to wholeness of life, as happened to the psalmist in Psalm 30:

‘You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have put off my sackcloth and girded me with gladness.’

What God wants for us is that we remain faithful and that we have life with him. Jesus is quoted in John’s Gospel as saying, ‘I have come that you might have life and have it in all its fullness.’ God longs to bring us back when we have strayed away, as we can see in the parable of the Prodigal Son. In Jesus Christ, through his death and resurrection, God has destroyed death and opened the way to eternal life, when the full glory will be revealed. Our victory is still by faith, that there will be an awakening when we shall see God and live for ever in his presence.

All summed up in this lovely verse from Psalm 16: ‘God will show us the path of life; in his presence is the fullness of joy; and at his right hand there is pleasure for evermore.’

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

