

## **The Valley of the Shadow**

These thoughts have been inspired by the Prayer and Fasting meditations that HBC members considered during February 2020. Here, we look at the passage suggested for Thursday 13th February:

### **John 11:1-44**

This passage had a particular poignancy as I anticipated the loss of a sibling in the near future. For us, the sisters' lament "Lord, if you had been here ..." did not apply as we had the assurance that the Lord was present and that He had control of the situation.

Now, some weeks later, the circumstances have changed and facing the prospect of death has become a reality for many households worldwide. The Lord has not lost control; he can bring healing but maybe he has a better plan. Jesus allowed Lazarus to die in order that a great good might follow - "many of the Jews ... who had seen what Jesus did, believed in him". Was that just because of the raising of the dead or had the Bethany family already introduced Jesus to their neighbours?

Earlier in the passage we learnt that Jesus placed himself in great danger by going to visit the family in Bethany (v 7 & 8). Does that have a modern parallel? History records many occasions when Christians have reacted positively to adversity, often at great personal cost, demonstrating the love of God even when He seems to be absent. In 1665 the Derbyshire village of Eyam isolated itself completely and successfully prevented the spread of the bubonic plague to other communities. In 1527 Martin Luther wrote: *"I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. ... If my neighbour needs me however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above. See this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God."*

Those words are still relevant, some 500 years later.

**Steve Humphreys**