

4th August All age Service

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Preacher: Jonathan Middleton

[0 : 0 0] you reveal to us about the Lord Jesus through your word, which you tell us is living and active. And we pray that your Holy Spirit would minister to each of us here this morning, would address us even as the Lord Jesus addressed Lazarus in the tomb. Would you address us each in our own situations and contexts, each with our own particular concerns and anxieties. Would you address each of us here, speak into our lives and circumstances, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Our reading is from John chapter 11, page 1078, if you like to have your Bible.

1-0-7-8, and it's in two halves. The first part is John 11, 28-37, and then there'll be a little gap, and then verse 38 to verse 44. So the first part, verse 28-37.

After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. The teacher is here, she said, and is asking for you. When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews, who had been with Mary in the house comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

[2 : 2 7] Where have you laid him? He asked. Come and see, Lord, they replied. Jesus wept.

Then the Jews said, See how he loved him. But some of them said, Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?

Thanks, Alan. So with the children in this morning, we're doing this in two parts. And the first part we're thinking about the distress of death. Now I wonder, when was the last time you cried?

Might have been this morning, might have been chopping onions, might have been a long time ago. When was the last time you shed a tear? And don't worry, you don't have to tell anybody. I'm not going to ask the children or adults to stick up their hands.

But do you ever think, when was the last time you cried and why? People cry for all sorts of reasons. It can be because we get hurt physically or have our feelings hurt.

[3 : 4 3] It can be because we're disappointed. Things don't go our own way. And we get upset about something. It can be because we're stressed or exhausted or under too much pressure.

Sometimes adults even cry because they're so happy. That can be a little bit confusing for us sometimes. People cry for all sorts of different reasons. So here's some real life examples.

Examples. And I should stress that this is from a web search. I didn't canvas the congregation beforehand. But real life examples. Confessions of why people cry. What made people cry.

So first one. I cried because I couldn't open a jar of pasta sauce. We've all been there. Second one.

My toddler had a gigantic tantrum because ants were only called ants. There weren't any uncles. I cried for an hour when I was 13 and couldn't log into my social media account.

[4 : 56] I welled up upon hearing the second movement of Beethoven's Emperor Concerto. I'm eight months pregnant and I cried yesterday because I didn't want to vacuum the floor.

Nobody was making me vacuum. I just had this desire to do it but I didn't actually want to do it. My three-year-old had a meltdown because she wanted to go to Africa instead of bed.

Well those are some silly reasons. Maybe you don't think they're that silly. But often when we cry it's through sadness and loss. Having to say goodbye to somebody or something that we dearly love.

And many of us at St. Silas are feeling sad at the recent loss of Gordon Reed. Still feeling the loss of Campbell, Fleming and others.

And it's sad. And in John chapter 11 verse 35 we have this extraordinary verse. We're told Jesus weeps.

[6 : 07] Even though he knows he's about to raise Lazarus from the grave. Jesus weeps. Even though he knows he's about to raise his friend Lazarus call his friend back to life.

Jesus weeps. And the question that we want to be asking ourselves is why? Why is Jesus weeping? So it can't simply be that Jesus is sad that Lazarus has died and he's missing him.

He knew what he was about to do. He was about to come back to life in half an hour or so. So why did Jesus weep? Well the crowd around him draw their own conclusions.

In verse 36 some of them said see how he loved him. And it's true. Jesus did love Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary.

But to understand what triggers Jesus' deep emotional response we need to think a little bit more about Jesus' response to Mary. And it starts off and it's exactly the same conversation Jesus had with Martha we saw last week.

[7 : 19] So Mary says in verse 32 Lord if you had been here my brother wouldn't have died. Exactly the same words as Martha in verse 21.

Jesus brings truth and tears. He brings truth to Martha I am the resurrection and the life and he brings tears to Mary. So notice how Jesus reacts in verse 33.

When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with also weeping he was deeply moved in spirits and troubled.

So Jesus reacts to her weeping by being deeply moved. And then again in verse 38 he's deeply moved. Actually the translation here is a little bit weak.

It doesn't just mean he's troubled. It means angry or indignant. It's actually the word used for a horse snorting in anger or rage.

[8 : 23] Maybe you've seen photos of the horse guards in London snorting in anger at tourists who have invaded their personal space. Well that's the word here.

Jesus is angry. He's deeply moved. He's greatly troubled. So why is he angry? Why would Jesus be angry at Lazarus' death?

Well those who say that death is normal, death is natural, don't know their Bibles. Death according to the Bible is unnatural.

It's abnormal. It's not the way it's supposed to be. It's true. This side of Eden we're all going to die. But death is the great intruder that's broken into God's world.

The great disruptor. And it's very stressful for Jesus up close and personal as he encounters the devastation and the distress that death causes as Jesus enters into the grief of all those he loves.

[9 : 34] He feels what they're feeling. He's distressed because they're distressed. Deep empathy. And we see here the unmistakable humanity of Jesus and his very real anger and distress in the face of death.

The unmistakable humanity of Jesus. Death produces in us all sorts of emotions sadness anger distress what ifs if onlys.

Jesus shares in all our grief. He weeps. So it's okay for Christians to grieve. Jesus grieved.

It's okay for us to cry. Jesus wept. It's not a sign of substandard believing. You know sometimes we think we go to a Christian funeral and we're only allowed to smile and be joyful.

[10 : 44] We know that Jesus is going to raise from the dead so it needs to be all smiles. No room for tears. Well that's not the way it is here. It's true.

We're not to grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope. We're thinking about that in the second section and again later on this evening. But confronted with death Jesus shares in the grief and the tears and the anger and the despair.

And that's a great comfort for us isn't it? Many of us here have grieved. Some of us are grieving at the moment.

For some of us it's just very raw indeed. When Jesus shares in our humanity he enters into your grief and he knows what it is you're going through.

Your struggles your pain your loss your anxieties your anxieties for the future your anxieties for exam results this week.

[11 : 49] He knows. So if you've received difficult news or if you are going to receive difficult news one way or another this past while and the days to come come to Jesus.

Jesus. If you're anxious about what the days ahead hold if you get that phone call from the doctor whatever it is come to him. And if you're sad this morning because you're missing someone you dearly love through death or distance desperately missing them run to Jesus.

We're all wired differently we all respond in different ways we all grieve differently that's okay but Jesus doesn't treat death as if it's nothing.

Doesn't brush over it doesn't try to sweep it under the carpet doesn't just put a brave face on it stiff upper lip Jesus wept but what Jesus did next changes everything it changes the way we grieve it doesn't take away the sadness of losing someone doesn't take away the tears but it gives us a fantastic hope for life beyond the grave gives us a fantastic hope for the present so I'm going to ask Alan back up now and read up the second part of the passage this morning again page 1038 and I'm reading the second half chapter 11 John chapter 11 verse 38 to verse 44 Jesus once more deeply moved came to the tomb it was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance take away the stone he said but

Lord said Martha the sister of the dead man by this time there is a bad odour for he has been there for four days then Jesus said did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God so they took away the stone then Jesus looked up and said father I thank you that you have heard me I knew that you always hear me but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here that they may believe that you sent me when he had said this Jesus called out in a loud voice Lazarus come out the dead man came out his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face

[14 : 48] Jesus said to them take off the grave clothes and let him go so we talk about the distress of death we're going to think about now the defeat of death so Jesus is once more deeply moved angry and they arrive at Lazarus' tomb and roll away the stone and then after praying Jesus does something quite extraordinary does something that must have seemed totally crazy to all those gathered around verse 43 Jesus shouts out into the tomb Jesus cries out in a loud voice Lazarus come out so just think for a moment how astonishing that is I mean who does that I was at the necropolis yesterday the great Victorian cemetery just east of Glasgow Cathedral I discovered last week that one of my ancient ancestors had a tomb there who happens also to have been a founding member at St Silas but that's another story so I went there with my son we took a cycle there to see if we could find the tomb which we did his great great great great grandfathers

Tim and being a sunny Saturday afternoon in the summer the place was absolutely chock-a-block with tourists absolutely mobbed and I did mischievously wonder to myself how they might react these groups of Italians and German and Japanese tourists if I'd suddenly shouted out at the top of my voice Henry come out and they'd have thought I'd taken leave of my senses or lost my marbles or lost my dog or something like that but when Jesus calls into the grave listen to what happens in verse 44 what happens when Jesus calls into the grave the dead man comes out and so the question we need to be asking ourselves is who is it who is it who stands in cemeteries and tells dead bodies what to do who is he that commands the dead to rise who is this

Jesus where does his authority come from and as we think about this we're going to take a note briefly of four things first thing he's definitely dead no question Lazarus is definitely dead now maybe you're skeptical maybe you're thinking well those gullible first century people might believe in that sort of thing but surely we've moved on from that now isn't it more likely a resuscitation from unconsciousness he just appeared to be dead more likely that than a miraculous resurrection from the dead but I don't think we can get away with that idea that Lazarus wasn't actually dead he just seemed to be dead they might not have had modern medicine in those days but they definitely had noses they could smell they knew what death smelled like and verse 39

Martha seems to suggest that in the heat of the Mediterranean sun it might not be such a good idea to roll away the stone there might not be a very pleasant odour in there after four days and the writer John pains to emphasise it isn't he instead of referring to Martha as Lazarus' sister she's the sister of the dead man the dead man who has been dead there for four days verse 44 he doesn't refer to Lazarus but the dead man came out so that's the first thing he's dead as a dodo as they say second thing it's a deliberate delay we explored this last week so we're not going to labour it this morning but it's worth saying again that Jesus if he'd wanted to could have prevented his friend Lazarus from dying that's what Martha says that's what Mary says that's what the bystanders say in verse 37 couldn't he who opened the eyes of a blind man have kept this man from dying well yes he could but Jesus chooses not to so we just flick back over to verse 5 of chapter 11

Jesus loved Martha Jesus loved Martha and her sister Mary and Lazarus so when he heard that Lazarus was ill he did a strange thing he didn't immediately rush to be with him no he stayed where he was two more days why because he was going to blow their perspectives he was going to do something even more incredible than heal from his sickness Jesus was going to prove that he's not just the lord of the sick bed but he's lord of the grave he's going to show that he loves these people he's going to show those that he loves that he has power over death itself so the third thing divine authority and here I'm afraid the double alliteration runs out but here is a man dead and buried in Jesus weeping at Lazarus graveside we've seen his unmistakable humanity on display

[20 : 25] Jesus is a human being but in Jesus calling into Lazarus tomb if this eyewitness account is to be believed we see his undeniable divinity on display Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man no one else but God alone has the authority no one else but God alone can call the dead back to life can call the dead back from the grave and so when Jesus calls out Lazarus come out he speaks with the same divine authorities when he cried out to the waves and the wind to be still the same divine authority as when he called creation itself into existence and now the evidence is walking before their very eyes the dead man is returned to life and so death the great intruder death the great enemy of the human race has come face to face with Jesus

Christ and lost death death has lost its grip death has lost its sting because death has been defeated and finally as we close I want us to think about this the children have a little bit of spot the difference in their workbooks but I want us to suggest here that John very deliberately in the way he's written out his gospel very deliberately draws parallels between the resurrection of Lazarus and the resurrection of Jesus so I want us to look at the similarities and differences just briefly as we close in fact not only does Lazarus' resurrection anticipate Jesus' resurrection but also Lazarus' death anticipates Jesus' death both deaths are for the glory of God and think about the way the burials are described both buried in a tomb in a garden both with a stone laid across the entrance in verse 39 of our chapter

Jesus said take away the stone when Mary Magdalene gets to Jesus' tomb the stone had already been removed from the entrance and then finally think about the grave clothes both of them Jesus and Lazarus described as being wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around their face or heads here's the difference the difference is when Lazarus comes out verse 44 his hands and feet are still wrapped in strips of linen a cloth still around his face and Jesus said to him take off the grave clothes but when Simon Peter came to Jesus' empty tomb he saw the strips of linen lying there as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head the cloth was still lying in its place folded up as some translations have it separate from the linen so Lazarus comes out of a tomb looking like an Egyptian mummy a dead man walking with Jesus the grave clothes are off neatly folded left behind

Jesus did not merely come back from the dead he went through death and came out the other side his resurrection is not a return to the same existence that he had before he was crucified like the raising of Lazarus who came back to life but later died a normal death Jesus' resurrection therefore gives hope and assurance to all who trust in him of eternal resurrection life his resurrection means the final death of death and so death is an enemy and we do right to weep at the graveside of friends and family that we've lost as Jesus did at the tomb of Lazarus but death is a defeated enemy that's been swallowed up in victory and so we're not to grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope to him be the glory and let's join together in prayer heavenly father we thank you that you are good and faithful we thank you that in your son the lord jesus christ you sent one who in his humanity understands our deepest desires and emotions and struggles one who understands our griefs and sense of abandonment and loss and we thank you father that in your son the lord jesus you sent one who in his divinity has power over death and sin and evil one who did battle with our mortal enemy death and one to him be the glory our risen resurrected king amen