

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me **has eternal life**, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life”

Throughout John’s Gospel is the message that anyone who hears the words of Jesus and believe in God will have eternal life.

All Saints Day

Today is All Saints' Day when, in the Christian tradition, we commemorate all saints and martyrs, known and unknown, throughout Christian history – and this has been a Christian tradition since the 4th Century AD.

As we turn our attention to the deceased saints of the past, we are reminded of those whose lives served as an example to us as Christians.

All Saints Day is also important because it is a day set aside during the year to tend to our grief – a time, for remembering the people we have loved and lost; those who were important to us and who had an impact on our lives.

This afternoon we will remember the faithful departed in our service for the bereaved.

As we are faced with grief, one of life’s most powerful human experiences, it may feel like a very lonely place. Many of us have awakened on the morning after the death of a loved one and wondered how the sun can rise another day and the Earth can continue to turn after *our* world has been turned upside down.

But today, in this church, as we gather together, our grief need not be lonely and isolating, but our sadness binds us together in a powerful way. And each year when we revisit our loss, it is hoped that the pain will begin to soften.

Jesus love for Lazarus and his family

In our gospel reading today, we are reminded that **Jesus is in solidarity with us in our grief**, as he is faced with the painful death of a loved one, in the familiar story of the raising of Lazarus.

We have learnt already of Jesus' love for Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. He has visited them often at their home in Bethany, at the foot of the Mount of Olives, just outside of Jerusalem. It was Mary who anointed Jesus with perfume and she who wept at his feet and wiped them with her hair.

The grief of Jesus

When Jesus arrives at the house of Lazarus, it is clear that He is deeply moved and troubled when he sees the distress and pain that Mary and Martha are suffering at the death of their dear brother.

Jesus himself begins to weep, for the death of Lazarus, and is filled with compassion and empathy for Mary and Martha. He takes on their grief and enters into their sorrow.

It is here that we see Jesus' very human side, in his genuine display of emotion, quite separate to his divine status as 'Son of God'.

Jesus has seen so much pain in his lifetime, and he borne it bravely. He has seen the suffering of his people crushed under the imperial rule of Rome; he has seen five thousand hungry and poor on a hillside; he has seen people tormented by demons, bleeding or paralyzed or diseased for years – in none of these situations has Jesus expressed emotion with tears, but has continued on his ministry and cared for them.

But here at last he breaks for the loss of His beloved friend.

Here Jesus was not afraid to express his feelings before God, and this should be true for those of us who grieve for a lost one.

(Some say Jesus' weeping is also to do with his sadness that the people do not understand him as God's Son, as if they have little faith.)

It must have been hard for Mary and Martha to comprehend how, if Jesus loved Lazarus so much, he chose to wait so long before coming to him, even though he knew that his dear friend was dying? By the time he arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead and in the tomb *for four days*. Perhaps Jesus had his own time and purpose, as he reveals signs of His divinity.

Maybe Jesus' weeping it is also to do with his knowledge that his own death will soon come - and this is a foretaste of the grief that will follow.....the death and resurrection of Jesus which *had to take place*, in order to make God known and for his glory to be revealed.

The hope of eternal life

The resurrection of Lazarus vividly symbolises God's victory over death. Jesus, who proclaims himself to be the 'resurrection and the life', testifies to this truth by raising Lazarus from the grave.

As Lazarus emerges from the tomb we are offered hope, promise and fulfilment. It is a reminder of what Jesus said earlier in John's Gospel:

““Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”

Conclusion

Those of us who read or hear these words from John's Gospel, just as those who witnessed Lazarus' raising, are given the opportunity to accept Jesus' claims as the Son of God and the promise of eternal life.

The story of Lazarus is no longer solely about illness and death, but about *resurrection and life and the glory of God.*

Today, on All Saints Day, we remember all those Christians who have gone before us, those from every age who have served Christ and lived the life of faith and are now in eternal life.

May we, just as those who witnessed the **raising of Lazarus**, be confident in the knowledge of eternal life and see the glory of God through whom we are given all comfort and hope.

Amen.