We've been working our way through the Gospel of John, and we're now up to the miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Last week was Part A, and it was a bit like Good Friday – all of the sadness, but we didn't get to the resurrection bit.

We took a moment to consider death and grief. And how as Disciples of Jesus, we mourn very differently, to how people of the world mourn.

With the faith that we have, we cannot mourn the same.
We believe:

- that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God;
- that He Himself rose from the dead; and
- in the resurrection to come –
  When Jesus returns, those who are His, will be raised to eternal life. We will not miss out on the return of Jesus…

And so the way that you and I mourn, is quite different to how people of the world mourn. (at least it should be).

But we also considered what I'm going to call "<u>compassionate empathy</u>." Even though we do not mourn the <u>same</u>, when a loved-one dies, there is still grief/mourning… And in compassion, and with empathy for others, **we** weep with those who weep; **we** grieve with those who grieve. We are not unemotional bystanders. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, who feel one another's joy/sorrow…

But we also have a magnificent comfort to give, as we remind our brothers and sisters, of resurrection that is to come (It's more than a hope – it is a hopeful certainty).

This is why Jesus was agitated/indignant when He saw Mary grieving in the same way as the Jews from Jerusalem were grieving.

So, that's where we got to last week. We'll now pick up from where we left off. In V34. Jesus says: **34** …"Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."

At which point, we come to one of the shortest verses in the Bible (2 words): **35** Jesus wept.
It's OK to cry (you know). Jesus did.

But the original Greek word used here, to describe the weeping of Jesus, is a <u>different</u> word to what has already been used to describe the weeping of Mary and the Jews. There's something different here. **Their** weeping, was an audible cry/howling/wailing/groaning… Jesus' weeping, simply means He shed tears…

For what did Jesus weep?

Was Jesus sorry that He didn't get Himself there in time to heal Lazarus and prevent him from dying? No. We're told that He was glad that He wasn't there, so that the Disciples would believe.

The Jewish visitors assumed His tears were for the loss of someone He loved… "See how he loved him!", they said…

The thing is, we're not told why Jesus wept. I suspect His tears were in empathy for those who were grieving… But maybe He also carried a deep sadness for the hopeless unbelief and the rejection of Him, that was unfolding before His eyes.

Even now, that rejection is solidifying. Some of **36** …the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" **37** But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"

It seems like they were calling into question whether Jesus was a one-trick-pony, or whether His power had consistency and substance…

They'll find out that out, soon enough. But, even then, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, doesn't convince some of them… And maybe that's why Jesus shed tears: because He knows He's going to be rejected; and He knows that all those who reject Him, will not have the life that He offers…

Now, when we get to V38, once again, our English translations do not capture the agitation that Jesus has at this stage. **38** Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb.

And we think of "being deeply moved" as "Oh, He was so sad…" But the English translation doesn't capture His agitation/indignation (it shouldn't be like this. He's really worked up over this.)….

Anyway, they come to the tomb: It's a cave, with a stone, rolled across the entrance.
39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Now Martha (she's the practical one) – she points out something that you do not want to have, as the final memory of your loved one…

For us, death has become so clinical. I*n Australia, 80% of deaths occur either in Hospital, or at an aged care facility*[i]. From there, the morgue refrigerates them until the funeral and burial or cremation…

But living out here, we know what a Kangaroo is like on the side of the road, 4 days later….

And Martha says, "Lord. It's been 4 days:- he stinks…" I mean, we can put up with the smell of a dead kangaroo on the side of the road, but do we really want the stink of a rotting carcass to become the final memory of a loved one…

So, for Martha, this becomes a moment for faith.
40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" (and she obviously believed, because they took the stone away)
41 …And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that

you sent me." 43 When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out."

With these words, you and I are given a profound insight into the prayer-life of Jesus, and into the way that Jesus (being God the Son) and being filled with God the Holy Spirit, communicates with His Heavenly Father (God the Father)… Does Jesus even need to pray? If the Father and the Son are one, does He even need to pray???

The Father always hears The Son. But Jesus is voicing this prayer (out loud), so that those who witness this miracle, would believe that Jesus had been sent by God…

Alright, Jesus' aim at this point, is not to become recognised as a miracle-worker, who is independent of God…

Jesus isn't doing this miracle on His own authority. He is asking His Father to do it. And the reason that Jesus is asking the Father to do it, is so that the people will know that the Father has sent Him, and that the Father approves of Him…

And so, Jesus cries out with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come out."

And, what a sight that must've been. (This would give you something to talk about, for the rest of your life).

- There is no stink
  or at least if there was, nobody mentions it;
- There's no maggots.
- his hands and feet are wrapped up;
- his head is bound up in a cloth;

Jesus says "Unbind him. Let him go."

I reckon a few folk would freak out at that. Wouldn't you?

Anyway, many of the Jews who came with Mary did believe. But not all of them. Some of them went back to Jerusalem and told the Pharisees what Jesus had done…

Do you think perhaps, "Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead" would convince the Religious Leaders, that Jesus had been sent by God? I mean, in all of Biblical history, it is only the prophets (the ones whom God had sent), who could do such a thing.

So, the Pharisees and the chief priests get together, to nut-out how they're going to respond to this…

"What are we to do? For this man performs many signs.
48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

Alright, there's their fear, right there… If everyone follows Jesus, this might upset the equilibrium…. The Religious Leaders are pretty happy with the equilibrium – they're pretty high up. They're not only leaders at the temple. They are leaders in the nation.

You see, the Roman Governor needed the Religious Leaders to be on-side with him, to help to keep the population under control… *It's the same reason the People's Republic of China have their own state-sanctioned church – to keep them pesky Christians under control – to make sure they don't honour Jesus, more than they honour the Communist Party…*

But, if the people sided with Jesus, rather than the Religious Leaders, there goes their power/control… And they were afraid that if the equilibrium was upset, not only would they lose their place as honoured and wealthy leaders, who have the ear of Rome… The people might rebel against Rome, and then they'd send in the Legions to tear the nation apart…

That would be catastrophic…

But then one of them (Caiaphas, the High Priest) said:
"You know nothing….. 50 Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."

What do you think he meant by that? I'm pretty sure he means: "We're going to kill Jesus". It is better for Jesus to die, than for the whole nation to be in danger, if the equilibrium's upset.

But, the thing with the Gospel of John (as I've told you before), is it doesn't only tell us what happened. It also reveals what's going on in the Spiritual Realm.
It says:

51 He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

Wow!!! That changes everything…. The High Priest intended it for evil, but his actual words, in the way that he said it, were a prophecy, inspired by God…

It is better that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.
Hasn't this been God's plan from the beginning?

3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

And so, even though the High Priest was evil and condemned the Son of God to death,,,, in his role as High Priest, he spoke a prophetic word that Jesus would die as Saviour of the world.
How good is that…..

As we discovered last week, miracles like the resurrection of Lazarus are a blessing, but this is pointing to something far greater that a short-term resurrection of someone we love.

The miracle, was to help people to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing in His Name, we might be saved.

You see, the resurrection of Lazarus, was joyous, but it was temporary.

Jesus was troubled in His Spirit – He was greatly troubled/agitated/indignant. Why?
Because even those who were close to Him – even Mary, wasn't seeing death, in the context of the future, eternal resurrection.

This is the blessing Jesus gives us:

- that we need not be afraid of death;
- that our hope is not in healing/ in a resurrection of a temporary body.

Our Hope is in Him.
Our Hope is in the resurrection to **eternal** life.
And that's why He died on the cross..

He died, that we might live.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,
we praise You,
that You have the power to heal the sick;
You have the power to raise the dead;
You have the power to do the greatest of miraculous works.

And we praise You for Your greatest miracle:
That by dying on the cross,
You atoned for our sins;
That by rising to life,
You conquered sin and death; and
We praise You, that Your promise is true.

We praise You that You will return again,
to judge the living and the dead;
That You will raise the dead,
not to a temporary life that will end,
but to life eternal.

And we look forward to this day.

We thank You for the wisdom of God,
That one man would die for the many.
That the perfect, sinless one,
would redeem those who have rebelled against You.

perfected, to eternal life.

We confess our sins to You.
Forgive us Lord,
for doing things our own way;
Forgive us for:

- our lies;
- our immorality;
- hard-heartedness;

- greed;
- worldliness;
- pride that prevents us from submitting fully to You.

Save us, Lord we pray;
Refine us;
take away all the wickedness and evil;
and fill us with Your eternal righteousness and love.

in Jesus' Name
Amen.

[i] https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/research/classifying-place-death-australian-mortality-statistics