

Sermon – Lent 5 – 10th April 2011 – John 11: 1-3 & 17-45

Theme: “Jesus says, ‘I am the resurrection and the life’.” (vs 25)

Introduction

Earlier this past week I spent time with my oldest sister, Anne, who lives in Adelaide. Unfortunately Anne is dying of pancreatic and liver cancer and doesn't have long to go. I hadn't seen Anne for a year, but naturally we have talked regularly on the phone. However, it is different to be able to simply sit and talk face to face, even though Anne is in hospital awaiting a bed in the hospice.

We yarned about many things but particularly the family, her grand-children and how she'll miss those close to her. We reflected on our upbringing, both remembering quite different aspects that were fond memories. I then spent time with my father, who is in a nursing home south of Adelaide, at Victor Harbor. Naturally we talked about Anne, about her going before Dad and how some things just didn't seem fair. The next day it was back sharing with Anne and discussion moved to her funeral, to faith issues and why she wasn't too sure about eternal life and what that meant. On my return to the office on Wednesday I began preparing for today's services and there in the Gospel for the day was the passage with Jesus speaking to Martha which seemed to jump out at me:

Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life. He (or she) who believes in me will live even though they die; and who-ever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (vss 25 & 26)

In the light of the week that I had already experienced this seemed a most appropriate section of the raising of Lazarus to centre today's reflection on.

Middle

Let's look a little closer at this. Jesus makes it clear that all will die physically but those with faith have eternal life, life in the spiritual age to come. There is a huge amount about this that we cannot comprehend – it is part of the faith aspect of the Christian life.

In my second parish in the mid 1980's I worked part-time as a hospice chaplain at Largs Bay in Adelaide. In that setting I shared with many who were dying and with their families. Likewise, I was called when people were close to death or to pray with families after their loved ones had died.

Some of those at the Phillip Kennedy Hospice I had got to know quite well over the weeks that they had been there. Hence it was with deep sadness that I shared with the families when death occurred. Some asked the question of me; “Did these experiences lesson your faith?”

I could honestly answer; “No – quite the reverse. If anything it increased my faith and my belief in an after-life.” As I looked upon those who had died, who I had got to

know in life, their body was no longer the person I had known. The ‘spirit’ the ‘life essence’ was no longer present in the physical remains – this wasn’t the person I had known. It was simply their earthly remains. These experiences gave me a sense that there is more to us than simply a bodily and intellectual functioning. There is that spiritual aspect, that ‘ongoingness’, that is beyond physical death.

Barnabas Lindars, in the New Century Bible Commentary, writes of this passage where Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life” that this means: “Through me people are raised up and receive eternal life.’

Lindars continues;

“Jesus creates a relationship with God which can survive death and so removes death altogether from the spiritual life of mankind. Physical death there must be, but from the point of view of life in God there is no death.” (page 395)

Jesus then asks Martha the faith question; “Do you believe this?”

Her response is; “I believe

Conclusion

Here for us is the challenge of belief:

- do we accept Jesus as the ‘resurrection and the life’ as we journey on the Lenten road to the events of Easter?
- what is our understanding of this ‘I am’ saying of Jesus which certainly adds to his troubles with the Pharisees in Jerusalem and adds weight to their wish to have him crucified for heresy?
- do we believe that there is life beyond death?

I believe there is life beyond death and this is a faith based decision.

However I also recognise that this will evoke discussion which is good!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, into our dying, sick world you bring life. Your life is insistent on bursting the bonds of our death. Forgive us, Lord Jesus, our attempts to secure our lives on our own – to live right, to eat right, to act and think right – rather than resting secure in your love and grace.

Disrupt our limited notions of what can and can’t be done in this world. Open our minds to the surprises that you want to work among us. Allow us the gift of faith to believe that you are indeed ‘the resurrection and the life’ – a hope in this world and the world to come. Bring us to the joy of the resurrection of Easter Sunday as we journey through Lent.

This we pray through Christ our Lord and our Saviour. Amen