

## ***Sermon by Revd Stephen Baxter – 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2020***

### ***The life of man is the vision of God***

It's a truly wonderful story where we encounter both the deep humanity of Jesus and the power of God working through him.

It's a story where we encounter the depths of the love he felt for Lazarus and his two sisters Martha and Mary and it's a story where Jesus faces direct criticism from his friends.

It's a story of the event that convinces the Jewish authorities that Jesus is becoming too turbulent, too much of a threat, too many are turning to him.

Jesus clearly had a deep friendship with Lazarus and his sisters who lived in Bethany. Jesus seems to have had a particularly special relationship with Lazarus. Several commentators interpret Lazarus as being disabled due to particular Greek words used to describe him and also since he doesn't speak in the stories when he is mentioned.

Despite the severe risk that he would be arrested and killed if he returned to Judea, Jesus makes the journey to help his friends and to display the power of God.

Lazarus dies before he arrives. Mary confronts Jesus directly – if you had been here, my brother would not have died – how could you? It's a cry that most of us at some point in our life will make when tragedy strikes. It's a cry that is undoubtedly ringing out amongst those who have lost members of families, friends through Coronavirus. Where are you God? Why is evil winning?

Jesus doesn't become defensive; he doesn't launch into a philosophical argument. As Rowan Williams puts it, "he goes to where it hurts".<sup>1</sup> He walks alongside the suffering.

Fully man, he is shaken to the core by grief. He weeps – that famous shortest verse in the bible. Jesus feels our pain. God is not a distant creator disinterested in his people – he draws alongside. He invites dialogue to plead for healing for light; invites to express our anger at evil, that turning from his light. The reversed thunder in George Herbert's poem Prayer – we can thunder back at God.

Lazarus is restored to life. It's a miracle of compassion for his dearest friends, but more importantly it's a signpost to the ultimate life Jesus offers through his victory on the cross and his resurrection - all through the power of God's spirit energising Jesus, God the Son.

That wise dude of the second century French church St Irenaeus memorably stated that the Glory of God is the living man; and the life of man is the vision of God. It's often misquoted and works on a number of levels:

The glory – the true essence of God, the presence perhaps evidence for God is someone who is living fully:

- Jesus brings back Lazarus to life as a sign of God;
- The death and resurrection to life of Jesus are the ultimate sign of God; and

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<sup>1</sup> From a sermon by Dr Rowan Williams when Archbishop of Canterbury in Christchurch New Zealand, 4 Nov. 2012. Accessed via <http://aoc2013.brix.fatbeehive.com/articles.php/2674/the-archbishops-sermon-in-christchurch-new-zealand-go-to-where-it-hurts-the-most>

- If we live fully we show the glory, the presence of God.

The call Come out is also addressed to us...Come out from the darkness/the tomb elements that we all have in our lives – our self-interest/our competitiveness/jealousy. Let the light in fully so we can reflect it more fully.

We give thanks that so many in the health services across the world are living fully and showing the glory of the God, who walks alongside us. Clap them at 8 o'clock.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

### **Intercessions**

Let us pray to the Lord,  
who is our refuge and stronghold.

Heavenly Father, in this time of confinement, we pray that you will draw near to us so that we will hear your voice more clearly to live your life to the full.

We pray for all those who suffering in mind body or spirit, especially those suffering with COVID-19 around the world, especially to those in our communities, and those including refugees without access to medical treatment. Bring health and a restoration to full life.

We pray for the lonely and vulnerable in isolation and we thank you for the remarkable commitment and selfless courage of all those working in health services. And we pray for all providing equipment and resources.

We pray for the Queen, the Prime Minister, the government and Parliament...give them wisdom, energy in their decisions and policies.

We pray for those we are concerned about in our families, our neighbours, our friends.

And we pray for all those who have left prayers or lit candles through the London Internet Church...as a selection of prayers recently submitted, we pray for Alison and Pete, frontline workers in the UK, for Dorothy in New York, for Rick in Glasgow remembering his brother, for Martin in London, for NHS workers, for the leaders of the world to know truth and compassion.

May all who have prayed through the LIC all members of the SSW community know your healing, light and hope.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**