



THE HOLY GOSPEL OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO JOHN

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus began to weep. So 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?” Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said,

“Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

JOHN 11:32–44

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

ISAIAH 25:6–9

PSALM 24

- 1 The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, * the world and all who dwell therein.
- 2 For it is he who founded it upon the seas * and made it firm upon the rivers of the deep.
- 3 "Who can ascend the hill of the Lord? * and who can stand in his holy place?"
- 4 "Those who have clean hands and a pure heart, * who have not pledged themselves to falsehood, nor sworn by what is a fraud.
- 5 They shall receive a blessing from the Lord * and a just reward from the God of their salvation."
- 6 Such is the generation of those who seek him, * of those who seek your face, O God of Jacob.
- 7 Lift up your heads, O gates; lift them high, O everlasting doors; * and the King of glory shall come in.
- 8 "Who is this King of glory?" * "The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle."
- 9 Lift up your heads, O gates; lift them high, O everlasting doors; * and the King of glory shall come in.
- 10 "Who is he, this King of glory?" * "The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory."

Creator and ruler of all, open our hearts that the King of glory may enter, and bring us rejoicing to your holy mountain, where you live and reign, now and for ever.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

REVELATION 21:1–6A

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

I once knew an Anglican priest who in response to a question at a confirmation class, said that he had done more than his share of funerals. Further, that he would often look at the displayed remains of the dead at visitations and wonder to himself, as he put it, "What was going on inside of there?" There are many theories around the world about his question.

When our second oldest daughter was in Grade 8, I helped to chaperone a camping trip to the Sylvan campground near Arkona. Adjacent to this fine campground is a cemetery which has monuments dating back to the nineteenth century. A bit of Ontario history can be seen by inspecting the tombstones. Times of plague are vividly apparent with large clusters of deaths

being recorded in stone. Also apparent are an inordinate number of young women who died in childbirth. Infant mortality was very common as well. Sadly, death was a frequent visitor to the communities of the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

What is interesting in this regard are the variety of suppositions about where the deceased go. It would seem by reading the tombstones that most are eternally resting. I can guess, but am not sure what people think that may be like. Others are in Jesus arms. Some are with their Eternal Father. And some others are with their family and friends. Occasionally, people see the departed one happily enjoying one's favourite pastime — eternally fishing or golfing, for examples.

One of the things Jesus came to share with us on earth is the knowledge that when we pass on, that we *pass on*. That is to say, it is not a lights out situation — that we continue to live, but just not here at our same earthly addresses. We are given very little information about what that eternal experience may look like.

In today's Gospel reading, we hear of the untimely death of poor Lazarus, brother of Martha. Jesus had been called to heal him before it was too late. But somehow our Lord seemed to be in no hurry to get there. This, understandably did not go over well with those close to Lazarus. He must have been a lovable guy. People were really upset over his loss. Jesus could see that, and he was moved by the whole situation.

I have a book of Celtic type prayers in which one prayer notes how Jesus was upset at Lazarus' death because of our Lord's compassionate heart. I had a fellow parishioner once, who made a point of coming over to me to set me straight on why Jesus was, *greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved*, in the story of Lazarus. "It was because Jesus was angry at the lack of the faith of these wayward people!" — he declared loudly. "These people should have been celebrating and rejoicing for Lazarus as he went to his eternal reward."

So who's right and who is wrong? Were Jesus' tears those of compassion or of righteous anger? I think there is a third answer to this question. To me there is an element of both in what Jesus did that day. Oh yes, it sounds like I am taking the diplomatic middle of the road. Be assured, that is not my motivation. What I think is that Jesus was indeed moved by the love for Lazarus that these people were showing. This love was heartfelt and shared among many people. Secondly, I sense a genuine concern — frustration maybe — from our Lord about how there seemed to be a certain feeling of hopelessness about Lazarus' fate — at least until judgment day. Lazarus was gone, dead and buried and that seemed so very final to those who loved him. Somehow, it became clear that much of what Jesus had taught and stood for — much of what he had done — didn't seem to be really getting through to these frightened people. So our Lord acted.

Christ brought these people whom he loved face to face with the reality of the situation. What appeared on the surface to be the case, was not really the whole story. Yes, the reality was that Lazarus' body was dead and smelly.

But the reality also was that Lazarus' spirit was indeed living in a realm that mortals cannot generally see. Jesus believed that he had to dramatically demonstrate the truth of Lazarus' situation in a way that people could see for themselves and believe. And so it is that we have that wonderful story being brought to us in scripture even in our 21st century.

Also it is worth noting that at the conclusion we have Jesus making a statement that at first may seem to be only a practical matter. Our Lord says, "Unbind him, and let him go." Nothing illogical sounding. The need for him to be unbound and cleaned up was fairly obvious. Yet this is more than a simple housecleaning matter. Here Lazarus is freed to live on for a while on earth without any constraints. He is to be allowed to share what he experienced, to express his thanks for the concerns of all who loved him, to think about what he wanted to do with the rest of his earthly life, and more. Jesus who tells us that the truth will set us free, is giving total freedom to Lazarus right there on the spot. There is no attempt to control what he is to say, or do. Jesus is the Jesus of perfect freedom and here he demonstrates that he is true to his word.

Where does this leave us? I hope we now experience a greater and more certain hope about a fundamental part of the meaning of our faith and about the author of what we believe.

God is our God at birth.

God is our God in all of life.

God is our God for all eternity.

We are forever blessed and we are ever so thankful.