

CAREY MORNING SERVICE – 31ST OCTOBER – LED BY JON NEALL

Message: Reading John 11: 1 – 43

Introduction:

We are on the cusp of November which traditionally is the month in the northern hemisphere when we remember our dead. Those who like to celebrate Halloween would have us believe that at this time the barrier between the physical and the spiritual is wafer thin and hence worthy of our attention.

I have to admit that I have reservations about Halloween and was drawn instead to a time in the life of Christ when he responded to his friends' call for help when life was threatened. Here too is a time when the gap between this world and the next is also thin.

A place to lay his head

It is clear from John's gospel narrative that the life of our Lord is being drawn inexorably to its close. In that last week of stress it is clear that he will get his rest at the home of his friends Martha, Mary and Lazarus although our story begins when he is out and about "doing his Father's business."

John has presented us with 7 signs in his gospel and the intention behind each of them is to promote belief in his followers. This story of Lazarus is the last of them and in many respects it is a parable written for us. We all want to know how much – if at all – Jesus cares for us. He has told us in the previous chapter that nothing will take us from the hand of God. (Jn 10:28 -29)

Our experience is that Christ is not physically with us. It became Mary and Martha's experience as well. They called on Christ when he was needed, and he did not come. How often is that our experience, we call for help and it seems as if our prayers fall on deaf ears and the comfort or the miracle we were expecting does not happen?

The sisters' response

Each in their own way come to Jesus when finally he does appear and make the same comment.

"If you had been here my brother would not have died." Even the crowd say similar things. "Surely one who could heal the eyes of the blind could have prevented this death." Perhaps he could but he chose not to. Why? It is more than clear that he was not untouched

by the death of his friend. We know from the Old Testament that it is not God's will that any should perish. Jesus is no different.

Martha's theology is perfect but how much of a comfort is it to her to be able to recite what will happen at the last day? *Do we know so much? Have we that confidence in our Lord?*

The Lord's response

In his conversation with Martha, he makes an unusual claim – and one that within a matter of days will bring him to the cross and a very similar grave. For the moment though his thoughts are with Lazarus and his family. He asks to be taken to the grave and there in tears he asks for the grave to be opened and there he is able to demonstrate just who he has claimed to be.

Lazarus's experience

It is true that the Lord will sometimes respond to our prayers for the healing of a friend or relative who is ill but sooner or later all of us will not be healed. We will come to a grave which remains closed until the Lord opens it with a shout (I Thess 4:13 – 18) and we will be invited to meet with the Lord. There is talk in Revelation of a feast being held like a bridal feast that will celebrate a new relationship with Christ. Exactly like Lazarus who feasts with the Lord in the next chapter of the gospel. No wonder Paul tells us to encourage one another with these words.

Conclusion

The experience of death will not pass us by – unless the Lord come quickly – but for those of us who believe there is hope of a grave opened and a renewing of friendship. Therefore encourage one another with these words.