

# The Lord Who Weeps

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[ 0 : 00 ] We come to this magnificent text in John 11 on this magnificent day, very aware that it has been a week of distress and death.

Not just in our own church family, as death has moved very close in some of the families in our church, but because on Tuesday in Brussels, another terrorist attack, killing 31, maiming and injuring hundreds, and the response of world leaders has been to squabble over the right words to use.

The thing about terrorism is that it operates by the fear of death, a sudden, brutal, violent, dismembering death. And it's one of the faces of evil and probably the ultimate weapon evil can wield, the weapon of death.

And it makes very strange our Western preoccupation with vampires and zombies and being entertained with shows that deliberately toy with the boundary line between life and death offering a strange vision that doesn't deal with evil at all, but receives number one ratings, the walking dead. And the question for us this morning is, what do we do with all this evil and suffering? What do we do in a world surrounded by death? What do we do when it enters our own lives and families?

[ 1 : 38 ] And a great deal depends upon the narrative storyline that you choose to believe and that you choose to live in. You cannot make sense of anything without a narrative storyline around it.

And in response to terrorism, there are a number of prominent cultural narrative storylines on offer. One of them is to demonise other people and to concretely say those people, people like them are evil.

And so there are threats of a nuclear response to those kind of people. And I think this works in the West because we have been desensitised and we have become insensitive.

But that response does not deal with death and it does not deal with evil because you can't defeat evil with evil. And you can't defeat death with death. It has some attraction to us because increasingly we use entertainment to trivialise death and violence.

But at a personal level, demonising others means the solution for us is just to grow more and more accustomed to every atrocity that happens in the real world. And that's no solution whatsoever.

[ 2 : 56 ] There is another narrative on offer. This narrative has a sort of a vague optimism that doesn't bear any facts.

And it's a form of self-righteousness. Robert Fulford, who I think is generally a very sensible commentator, wrote yesterday in regard to the Brussels attacks, there's a wistful hope that rises among us.

Perhaps this could be settled by decent people acting together. Well, I think this also works in the West because of our growing over-sensitivity.

There's a kind of a paradox going on for us. Many of us look at the world and are tortured by the sufferings of others and we call on political leaders to do something and we don't think that we can do anything.

And for us as individuals, the solution then is to make everyone like us and to protect ourselves from the big bad world. And that, of course, is no solution at all.

[ 4 : 08 ] And this brings us to John 11, which offers us a completely different narrative. This is the day that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and Jesus steps right in the midst of suffering and evil and pain and death and he does two things.

He weeps with deep emotion and he awakens Lazarus, turning death into resurrection. And this is the basic shape of the gospel narrative.

The son of God coming from heaven to enter into our suffering and our evil, bringing something far more powerful and healing and hopeful than any political or personal solution giving us himself.

And I don't think there's any chapter in the New Testament that more forcefully brings together Jesus' authentic humanity and his divinity. In weeping, we see the glory of Jesus' humanity. In waking Lazarus, we see the glory of Jesus' divinity. And so if you want to follow along, you can look at the passage back on page 5 and 6 in your news sheet or you can look at chapter 11 in the Bibles on page 8, 9, 7 if you'd like.

[ 5 : 36 ] Firstly, let's look at the glory of Jesus' humanity and his weeping. If you look down there at verse 35, it's the shortest verse in all the Bible, but one of the deepest.

It simply says, Jesus wept. And the reason it's surprising is because Jesus knows he has the power to raise Lazarus from the dead.

He's just said that he's about to do so. And if you knew you had the power to raise someone from the dead and were about to do so, would you weep? I wouldn't.

I'd tell people, keep calm, carry on, everything's going to be okay. The tears of Jesus are a surprise and a great gift to us.

This whole story starts about a week before Jesus is in a different place and when he gets the message that Lazarus is at the point of death, he stays where he is.

[ 6 : 40 ] He says, I will raise him, but if you put yourself in Martha and Mary's shoes, it just seems cruel and heartless. And when death and evil come close to us, a natural question like Martha and Mary is we send messages to God and we say, it's obvious God what you need to do, but he doesn't sometimes.

And we ask, does he love us? And in the early part of the text, John makes very clear, it is because he loves Martha and Mary that he delays.

He wants to give them something far better and so it is true for every one of us. Every delay from God is a delay that comes from love. Jesus arrives in Bethany.

Both sisters individually say to him, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And we pick up at verse 33. When Jesus saw Mary weeping and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

And he said, where have you laid him? And they said to him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. So the Jews said, see how he loved him.

[ 8 : 03 ] But some of them said, could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also kept this man from dying? See, what is very strange is that in just a few minutes, Jesus is going to go and speak a word of power to the corpse of Lazarus to bring Lazarus from the dead back to life again, but still he weeps.

And I think this is the glory of Jesus' humanity. He deliberately chooses to identify. He deliberately chooses to enter into our trauma and our grief and our pain.

He will not close his heart to us even for a few minutes, even when he knows he's going to transform our circumstances. He's deeply affected by our sorrows, by our experience of evil.

Not from a safe distance, but from within our experience. And you see, the Bible's your suffering is the most multidimensional and nuanced there is, because you have both a God who is sovereign and all-powerful, and you have a God who suffers in our suffering.

Evil is an intrusion in God's good creation and is the enemy of God. And in Jesus Christ, he experiences the full range of human experience of weakness or sorrow and death itself.

[ 9 : 23 ] Christ weeps with us. And I don't know what's more consoling, frankly, the fact that Jesus can raise the dead or the fact that he weeps with us.

Whether it's at the bedside or whether it's at the graveside, Jesus weeps. But notice that's not his only emotion, please.

In verse 33 and verse 38, we have this very weak translation. He's deeply moved in his spirit.

Actually, in the original, it says he is ragingly furious and angry.

It's a word that's used in Old Greek for animals snorting when they're about to go into battle. He is agitated and indignant.

It could be better translated, quaking with rage. And while his tears show his anguish and his empathy entering into our suffering, he also bristles with outrage and revulsion because he sees death for what it is.

[ 10 : 30 ] He's furious at the results of death. And the whole misery of human existence rises before him and he burns with rage against this power that's kept us oppressed since the Garden of Eden.

Death is the object of his wrath. He is no calm, stoic, detached teacher. And this is not the fury of powerlessness or futility or frustration.

It's the rage of a lover and a champion who's about to put things right but who knows what it's going to cost to put those things right. He has come to deal with evil and death and to defeat it.

And the way he does it is he wants to destroy evil without destroying us. And you know where that leads him. It leads him to the cross. Because at the cross he goes in weakness making himself vulnerable to what we deserve, vulnerable to our suffering, absorbing our evil, paying for our sin.

And as we've just said in the creed, when he comes again it means he will not have to judge us but receive us to himself because he has already taken the punishment for those who trust him.

[ 11 : 54 ] And you may be saying, well what good are tears and even what good is outrage in the face of evil and death? We've had plenty of that this week. And the answer is, well it all depends.

It is good to weep. But if the one weeping has in his life, in his hands, death and life and eternal life, if the one who's weeping is stronger than death and still weeps, that's glorious.

So we move from Jesus, the glory of Jesus, humanity, secondly to the second surprise where Jesus raises Lazarus and this is the glory of his divinity, I've called it, the two of course are the same person.

And if you look down at the passage, Jesus moved again in verse 38, comes to the tomb and he says, please take the stone away and Martha, the wonderfully practical Martha says, actually the stone's there for a reason.

He's been there four days. He's beginning to decay. And our very polite English translation says something like, there might be an odour. I think someone told me between the services, the old authorised version says he stinketh.

[ 13 : 07 ] Verse 40, Jesus said, did I not tell you that if you believe you would see the glory of God? And then he prays to the Father and verse 43, when he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, two words, here, out.

And the man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, his face wrapped with a cloth and Jesus said, unbind him and let him go. It is a stunning miracle.

Jesus, with his word, reaches through the barrier of death and pulls someone who was already in the grip of death back, the grave gives up its control.

And you might say, well, what's the point of that? I mean, the fact that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead is very impressive, enormously impressive, but it has absolutely no meaning and significance for you and me now unless he can deal with evil and unless he can deal with death now and on a permanent basis.

And we have to read the whole gospel because John, in this gospel, calls all of Jesus' miracles signs. They point beyond themselves. And what is this a sign of?

[ 14 : 26 ] Well, at the very least, it demonstrates that Jesus is more powerful than death. With just a word, he speaks to death and death has to obey.

No human can do that. He's got absolute authority over this physical world. The Lazarus in a corpse that has begun to decay, Christ makes him alive. That's obvious.

But when Lazarus came out of the grave, as we learned a little bit with the children this morning, it was not a full resurrection. Lazarus was returned to this earthly life.

He was mortal. He'd been well and truly dead for four days, so it was not a resuscitation. But though it was wonderful, he still was returned to this life, but I'm not sure Lazarus would have been all that happy with it.

I mean, he would have had to go through the whole prospect of dying all over again. But when we come to the end of this gospel, after Jesus has given his own life over to death on the cross, he rises in a new resurrection body, passing through the grave clothes, passing through the tomb, passing through walls, a body that is perfect, eternal, glorious, a picture of ours, a body he promises to give us.

[ 15 : 47 ] And that is the focus of the story. It's Jesus' promise back in verses 25 and 26. Jesus says to Martha, I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? I mean, that is a stunning claim.

You don't make that sort of claim if there is a dead body nearby. But it's so wonderful that Jesus has made this claim because those words of Jesus are the bridge between what he did on that day and

us today and what he can do.

He is saying that I am the one who holds the keys of life and I am life. I am resurrection. I'm the author and source of life and resurrection. And that's way more than Martha had believed. And this is one of the most interesting things. If you track through this story and write through John's gospel, the disciples sort of believe. And Jesus wants to draw their faith more and more toward him. [17:01] And when Jesus says to her, your brother's going to rise again, Martha says to him, yeah, I know. I'm an orthodox Jew. I know he's going to rise at the resurrection and the last day. Everyone who believes in God knows that.

I mean, both Martha and Mary know that Jesus is a special person. They know he can heal people and he can do nature miracles and he can multiply fish and loaves but they had no imagine that the man standing before them had the power of life and death.

Couldn't imagine that. And in the early part of this passage, when Jesus first receives the news, verse 4, for those who have the Bible open, Jesus says this, the illness, it will not ultimately lead to death, it is for the glory of God and then he says something remarkable, so that the Son of God might be glorified in it.

In other words, the glory of God which is the revealing and shining and display of his goodness. All of John's Gospel is saying that the pinnacle of the glory of God is Jesus Christ as the Son of God. If you want to know what God looks like, you look in the face of Jesus Christ. The fact that God the Father sent Jesus means that now if you want to worship God, you worship Jesus.

[18:24] Jesus says the way that we honour God is to honour him. That's why Jesus says at the centre of this story in response when Martha says, yeah, I know he's going to rise at the last day.

No, no, he says I am the resurrection and the life. Don't look to the future. Look to me. It's very important. See, what does Jesus say to those of us who are being touched by death or those in sorrow or those in grief?

What does he say to those affected by terror? He says, come to me. I am the resurrection and the life. And since he is the resurrection, he makes a promise, a future promise about the last day. He says, whoever believes in me, though they die, and yes, all his followers will die, though they die, yet shall they live. After death, this promise is that Jesus will bring us into the resurrection by raising us from the dead, giving us resurrection bodies that are perfect, glorious, immortal, and eternal.

Bodies that have the capacity to live in the presence of God and each other without decay, without death, without corruption. That means that death or evil or terrorism can never have the final word.

[19:46] That's in Jesus' hands. But notice, he's not just the resurrection. He says, I am the resurrection and the life. Two things, not just one. It would be enough if he were just the resurrection, I think.

But since he is the life, he makes a promise for here and now. He says, everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

So that when we trust and believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, we receive a new life now. Jesus is talking about the authentic Christian experience.

That he himself comes to dwell within us and he brings with him his own life, this eternal life. And eternal life doesn't start when we die. It starts now in this life and it continues and our bodily death doesn't stop it.

The life with Christ continues. So for the Christian, death is moving from the presence of Christ with his loved ones here and now to the presence of Christ more fully with the loved ones there.

[20:58] He is promising to give dead and dying people triumph over death and a life that contains eternity within it.

And this is the storyline of the gospel. And that's why Jesus says at the end of verse 26, Martha, do you believe this? And she remarkably says, yes, Lord, I believe.

And she fills the belief with content. You are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world. It's very important to Jesus.

He wants to draw us out so that we believe in him. I think without Jesus as the Son of God, we will never, as humans, ever be able to deal with evil and death.

We are alone in our sorrow. But the glory of Jesus' humanity and his divinity means that we can rest our sorrows and our griefs and the things we don't understand into his hands because he cares for us more deeply than we can imagine and he is stronger than death and evil and like a shepherd, he

will protect us and guide us into the pasture.

[ 22 : 13 ] And the gospel says to us that he is so committed to dealing with evil and death that he goes in and enters death in our place, suffering for us so that we might have life.

This is very big stuff. This is not temporary consolation so that we can get on and live our lives. This is not a little bit of comfort. He's come to bring us life in the midst of, in the face of death and evil to bring us resurrection life and to bring us to resurrection life.

This is the glory of his divinity. He has the keys of death and hell and he wants to use them for us. And this is the glory of his humanity.

He feels what we feel. He has been inside our experience and the fact that he has taken our death into himself and defeated that death and is now raised, we have more than ever reason to believe that he is the resurrection and the life.

I say again, without this storyline it seems to me everything is futility. This is where we ought to be pointing each other. Without this storyline it's all rage and anger and suffering and fruitlessness.

[ 23 : 33 ] But if God has, the Son of God has entered into our genuine humanity with his genuine divinity, if he has invaded our death with his life, it means that though we are surrounded by sorrow and though we will have to pass through the experience of death, he will transform and he will bring his life into us now.

And that's why he invites everyone. There is no barrier. He says, whoever believes in me, everyone who lives and believes in me, and so the question he asks Martha is the question for us today and the question we ought to ask each other after this gathering, do you believe?

And we say, yes Lord, we believe. Help our unbelief. Amen.