

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups. July 8th 2007

Going deeper in Prayer – for Healing

John 11:38-44

The Raising of Lazarus

Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon:

The story of Lazarus is the last and greatest of the signs of God's Kingdom recorded in John's gospel. (See beginning of John ch 11.) Jesus was across the Jordan when He heard about Lazarus' sickness and He was expected to go immediately to heal His friend, but He waited 2 days. On the way to Bethany, Jesus met Martha – she was the busy one, the elder sister (see Luke 10, where Martha complained that Mary wasn't helping her). Then Mary, who had sat listening to Jesus, also came to meet Jesus, and the crowd of mourners followed her. Both sisters were distraught about their brother's death.

1. Jesus is deeply moved. He weeps with the sisters: John 11 v 35, "Jesus wept," is the shortest verse in the Bible, conveying a truth of enormous significance. The sisters were wailing and crying out loud, as was the custom: that's what's implied by their word for weeping in v 33. But Jesus' weeping is actually a different word; it implies a quieter, more personal grief. He is involved. He is hurting. He felt for the sisters, and He stood alongside them, just as He loves us and stands alongside us when we are in pain or grieving. In this story Jesus goes to an unpleasant place with His followers - in this instance to a putrid-smelling cave where Lazarus was buried. So He does with us: even when we are in places that seem desolate or dirty, Christ will come if we ask Him.

2. The timing of the healing is *God's timing*: at the beginning of the story, Jesus waits. By the time He arrived, Lazarus had been dead for 4 days. Jesus wanted everyone to see the raising as a miraculous sign from God. Lazarus' resurrection was to be a tremendous boost to the disciples' faith just before Jesus' own death; so that when Jesus Himself rose from the dead, in a way that would seem to echo the events at Lazarus' tomb, people would remember what happened at Bethany. And eventually they recognised that in Jesus' resurrection was the ultimate proof of God's love and power, made manifest once and for all. But when God makes *us* wait for answers to prayer for healing, sometimes it's impossible, to see the reason. See Job in the OT, robbed of all he owned - his property, his children, his health. Sometimes we are simply left with the fact that God is Almighty God, and His purposes are hidden. Times like that are incredibly hard; all we can do is rest in what we know about God, in all His promises, and trust Him with our suffering.

3. But there's another agenda here: look at v. 40. Lazarus's healing was purposely not to be the private affair of making a fever better. It was to be a clear sign of God's glory for Martha - and also, of course, for the crowd of Jews who had followed the sisters, for the early Church and for us 2,000 years later.

4. The prayer v41-2: Jesus didn't rush. Before He said anything, He refocused towards God. And the first word Jesus speaks is "Father". His relationship with His Father was the cornerstone of everything Jesus did and underpinned all His prayer

5. Jesus' Healing is more powerful than anyone could have imagined. Look v 44. In the NRSV Jesus' command is translated as "Unbind Him". Lazarus is unbound, freed from not just the grave clothes that bound him: he is freed from death and healed in the fullest sense. So in this resurrection of Lazarus, the pre-echo of Jesus' own resurrection, Jesus offers to unbind *our* tomb clothes and let us go; He sets us free from all that would hold us back in life and from the penalty of sin which is death. Life in Him is true healing.

Witness: Questions to discuss

1. Why is Jesus' grief at the grave-side significant?
2. What experience do you have of desolate or dirty places where Jesus has stood alongside you? Have you ever been reluctant to ask Jesus to be there? Why?
3. What might you say to someone who has prayed for healing and it doesn't seem to have happened?
4. What is the significance of "*Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father..."*" (v.41) ?
5. David Schlafer said, "Just because you are breathing, it doesn't mean you are living. Just because you're cured, it doesn't mean you're healed." What do you make of this statement?
6. Look at 2 Cor 12 7b-9. What does this mean for Paul? For us?
7. Look at John 11:25. What does this statement mean for you, your closest family member or best friend and others you know? Pray for these people.

Spend time praying for each other for physical, emotional or spiritual healing.