

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups June 29th 2008

Witnessing with Jesus . . . at death's door

John 11:1-44



Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

Key words : Bethany = House of Anguish: Lazarus = God is my help

Key Themes : Grief Hope Power

This is the last of the seven signs and five 'I am' sayings. It is the longest narrative in this Gospel besides the passion narrative. It is placed right at the midpoint of the Gospel at the point of transition between Jesus' ministry of works and words and his ministry of salvation as the passion narrative begins. Set in Bethany this is about knowing God is my help in the house of affliction.

Mary, Martha and Lazarus live at Bethany, are good friends of Jesus, and so the sisters send news to Jesus of their brother's sickness. There is no request attached to the news. It is up to Jesus how to respond. He waits until Lazarus is dead and buried (after 3 days it was believed the soul which hung around the body during that short time after death would have left). This sickness would not end in death but be for God's **glory**. Hard to believe as his disciples realised Lazarus was dead and buried.

Grief and Hope: Jesus encounters understandable grief of the sisters who are sitting Sheva.. the seven days of mourning after the burial of the deceased when visitors come and console and cry. Martha and Mary both come out to him. The first unbidden. Both chastise him for not being there. With Martha Jesus meets her grief by speaking about Resurrection Hope which she clearly realises with her mind. Jesus reveals who he is: 'I am the resurrection and the Life' and the need for belief. She clearly knows that he is the Christ, the Son of God, the one which is to come, but this knowledge seems to produce little comfort to her. Mary comes to Jesus and as is always the way with her, is found at Jesus' feet (usually in worship or as a disciple listening to him). His response to Mary's grief is to weep (snort like a horse does) and this weeping is profoundly deep. He expresses his own grief along side her.

Hope: then he calls for the tomb to be open: at Martha's objection (because of the stench) he reminds her to believe.. where there is belief then the glory of God will be seen. And he calls our Lazarus! Here! Come!

Power: Lazarus come forth and is unbound by others. Jesus' Resurrection power is then met with ministry from those around. May be as we see God work amongst us we are included in that work with different ministries that help to unbind the one who has been called out into resurrection life.

God's power is at work beyond our abilities and is abundant in its effect and expression. Where ever we are at home at work in the neighbourhood he will work to express this same Hope that goes beyond thinking and theology goes beyond our skills and desires.

We are called to follow Jesus and so to imitate him .and we become his 'form' to others whether or not we ever speak his name to them. We need to be filled with this resurrection powered hope.. not just intellectually assent to its truth. 'If you have this hope then all your life people will see you in this form' (a Mozambiquan Pastor who has seen much destruction).



Witness: questions to discuss

1. How do you help those you have known who grieve? What can you learn from Jesus' different approaches?
2. Do you find it difficult to come along side those who are grieving? Why is that?
3. How does it make you feel to know that you need to rely on God's power as you do the work he has given you to do?
4. Why do you think Jesus needed his disciples and friends to understand hope and resurrection power at this stage in his life and ministry?

5. How have you been sustained by God's Help and Hope in the your House of Anguish ?
6. How can you support one another this week to trun to God for his powerful help and hope?
7. Bring your own 'tombs' that's contain the 'stench of death' to God and ask him to fill yo with his hope instead.