

Applying it all to ourselves

This present life we live is still mortal – Lazarus died again! While Jesus came to give life in all its fullness he has not removed from us the possibility of the physical deterioration, suffering and death of this mortal frame. The raising of Lazarus – and the resurrection of Jesus himself – reminds us that physical death is not the end, but an open door to the fuller experience of the eternal life which we begin to know here and now as we put our trust in him.

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

- What does that mean for us in our daily life?
- How do we reflect on that as we face bereavement or as we contemplate the end of our own life?

For the people of our day...

Two things are ultimately unavoidable, so they tell us – death and taxes. Yet we try to avoid the one and minimise the other as much as possible! Paul begins Ephesians 2 with a statement that “you were dead in your transgressions and sins” before being made alive in Christ. Do we sense the smell of death on our culture and way of life?

- How would Australians respond to the idea of Jesus as “the Resurrection and the Life”?
- What associated ideas are there in the Australian culture that would help to communicate this teaching about Jesus?



A number of years ago, we were travelling from Brisbane to Melbourne along the Newell highway. New South Wales was in the grip of a serious drought and a locust plague was the final straw.

Paddock looked completely bare of grass, but a few lean animals were searching for the last pickings. In places the roadside, for all its dangers, provided fodder for the needy beasts.

Then, up ahead, we saw a cloud of red dust. Not a “willy willy” this time. We slowed to a standstill. Sheep were being driven across the road. There was nothing for it but to wait and to give a wave to the watchful farmer who, with the help of his men and the dogs, was moving his sheep to better pasture. Hundreds, perhaps a thousand or more!

“The Lord is my Drover, I shall not want”? I am not at all sure the image would fit!

- How would Australians respond to the idea of Jesus as “the Good Shepherd”?
- What associated ideas are there in the Australian culture that would help to communicate this teaching about Jesus?

Today we are thinking of Jesus as the life-giver – bringing life even for the dead! The claim arises from something that actually happened, but has wider implications for us all.

The Situation in Jesus’ Time

It is important to keep in mind that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, promised, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” In fact, all of the “I am” sayings of Jesus have this emphasis on life.

He is the Bread of life. Following him, we will have the light of life. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the true Vine.

It could sound as if following Jesus gives us a charmed life! Yet Paul writes, “as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beating, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger...” (2 Cor. 6:4-5, NIV).

Bethany was a village about three kilometres from Jerusalem on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives. Jesus’ friends, Martha, Mary and

Study 5: “The Way, the Truth and the Life” Reading: John 14.1-14

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Lazarus, lived there. It is quite probable that during the events recorded in John 7-10 Jesus was staying with his friends at Bethany.

But in 10:40 we are told that “Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptising in the early days” – perhaps some thirty or forty kilometres away. Here he continued to minister for a time.

In his absence, his friend Lazarus took sick and the sisters sent a message to Jesus. Receiving the message, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it” (11:4). Reckoning that Jesus was only a day’s journey away and that Lazarus had been buried for four days when Jesus arrived (v. 17), we realise that Lazarus was most probably already dead when Jesus received the message.

Yet he delayed two days before returning. Why? Certainly the miracle was heightened, for the Jews regarded death as permanent after the third day. But Jesus would not have extended the suffering of his friends for the sake of a more spectacular miracle. Rather, as Leon Morris puts it, “what He did He did in God’s time, and according to God’s will. He was not to be coerced, even by His dearest friends. All the more is this the case in the present instance, because Jesus was going up to Jerusalem to His death, the climax of His mission.”

- Why did Jesus delay his return to Bethany? Try to understand it from the standpoint of the disciples and from the standpoint of Mary and Martha.

Reading: John 11:17-27

Jesus arrives in Bethany to the news that Lazarus has already been in the tomb for four days. A number of Jews are there to comfort the sisters. Leon Morris notes. “They apparently came with the intention of staying for some time and not simply of paying a passing visit. A fairly prolonged stay to comfort the bereaved was apparently usual at the time of bereavement. At the funeral itself the mourners were left alone with the sorrow and their friends refrained from speaking to them. But later it was expected that visits for consolation would be made, and the Jews rated this duty highly.”

We notice in v.20 a difference in the attitude of the sisters – not unlike the difference in the incident recorded in Luke 10:38-42.

“Lord, if you had been here... “ As noted already, Jesus could not have arrived before Lazarus’ death. Martha expresses the conviction that Jesus, who had healed so many others, would have healed her brother and “even now God will give you whatever you ask.” Leon Morris again. “On the surface of it it seems to mean that Martha knew that Jesus even now could

perform the miracle, that He could raise Lazarus from the sleep of death. But the subsequent narrative shows that she cannot have meant that, or at any rate that if she did mean it she was not able to sustain the high faith it implies.” In v.24 she expresses confidence that her brother will rise “in the resurrection at the last day.”

But Jesus means more than that. He is not simply the guarantor of life beyond this life. He is the life-giver now! As he says to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”

- What did Jesus mean when he called himself “the Resurrection and the Life”?
- In John’s Gospel we hear Jesus saying a great deal about “eternal life”. To what extent do we think of eternal life as “life beyond death”? or as a quality of life here and now? Reflect on John 3:16 and 17:3.
- Christianity has sometimes been charged with offering people “pie in the sky when you die.” What do you think about “eternal life”?

Yet Lazarus is dead. And what Jesus is saying about life has a great deal of relevance as we face the reality of death. Jesus is not side-stepping the grief of the sisters.

Leon Morris comments, “For the heathen or the unbeliever death may be thought of as the end. Not so for the man who believes in Christ. Such a man may die in the sense that he passes through the door we call physical death, but he will not die in the fuller sense. Death for him is but the gateway to further life and fellowship with God. This transcends the Pharisaic view of a remote resurrection at the end of time. It means that the moment a man puts his trust in Jesus he begins to experience that life of the age to come which cannot be touched by death.”

We note Martha’s strong affirmation of faith. “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world” – an affirmation that parallels Peter’s at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:16). She is not just confident in what Jesus can do, but in who he is.

The story moves on to his meeting with Mary, his deep grief at the whole situation (not just because Lazarus had died, but because of the unbelief of all who were present) and the raising of Lazarus to life. We note in v.42 the concern of Jesus in his prayer “that they may believe that you sent me.”