

Sermon 4 November 2018 All Saints Day

John 11:32-44 (Raising of Lazarus)

The story of the raising of Lazarus is mentioned in only John's gospel, which raises interesting points. If the writers knew about this miracle, how could they possibly omit it? If it actually happened, how could they fail to know about it?

In the other three gospels there are accounts of people being raised from the dead. Matthew, Mark and Luke all include the account of the raising of Jairus's daughter. There is the story of the raising of the widow's son at Nain in Luke. But in both these cases, the raising took place immediately after death. It is quite possible that the persons involved were actually in a coma. Burial had to take place very soon after death in the Palestine climate, and without wanting to spook you, there has been evidence that people were not infrequently buried alive because of that haste.

So perhaps in these two cases it was a miracle of diagnosis on Jesus's behalf. But Lazarus was a different story. He had been dead for four days, and smelt like it! So just what did happen? We don't really know but undoubtedly something tremendous did happen.

In the end, as is the case with so many stories in the Bible that we struggle to comprehend in a literal sense, we look for the message, we look for the teaching because therein lies the truth. There may be problems with this story; we may never know what exactly happened in Bethany so many years ago; but we do know that in Jesus we have resurrection and we have life. We do know that in Jesus we find new beginnings, we find fulfilment and meaning in our lives. That is what this story is all about. Let me give you another story.

A mysterious traveller once visited an old, run-down monastery. At one time the monastery had thrived. Young men came from far and wide to join the monastery. At the time of the traveller's visit, however, all had changed. Only a handful of monks remained and they could hardly stand each other. The once spotless buildings had begun to fall into a state of disrepair, and the worship of the monks was uninspired.

The monks told the traveller the dismal story of their monastery. They begged the traveller to stay and help them rebuild their order. But he refused. 'I cannot help you to restore your order. All I can do is to tell you that one of you is a true apostle of Christ.' And with that, the mysterious traveller left.

The monks were amazed at the traveller's words, and each one began to secretly ponder the meaning. Could this really be, they thought? Could one of us actually be a true apostle of Christ? Could it be Brother Phillip? Or Brother Thaddeus? Or perhaps....perhaps even me?

Little by little that old monastery began to change. The monks began to treat each other with respect, not knowing which one of them was a true apostle. In fact, each monk even began to treat himself differently, not knowing if he were the one. The monks began to repair the buildings, to make them suitable as a home of a true apostle of Christ. Their worship became charged with passion and praise; after all, they knew that a true apostle of Christ was worshipping amongst them.

As more time went by, people who passed by and visited the monastery noticed something that had not been there before. Although their number was small, the monks truly seemed to love and respect each other. Before too long, people began to visit to worship with the monks. Younger men began to arrive at the monastery, asking questions. Many chose to stay and join the order. Within a few years, the monastery was thriving once more and without realizing it, each of the monks had himself become a true apostle of Christ.

This is a story of new beginnings. This is a story of the monks finding fulfilment and meaning in their lives. This is a story of resurrection. And how did this come about? Purely and simply because the monks rediscovered the spirit of Christ in their midst.

There are so many ways we can experience resurrection in our lives – in the healing of relationships, in dealing with problems, in change of direction with career, in coming to terms with loss, and so on. With Christ on our side, that healing can be made possible and even enhanced.

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