

Jesus – The Resurrection and the Life

I've always felt a little bit scared in tunnels. I don't know what it is about them, but I've never felt comfortable in them. Maybe it's the darkness, the absence of light, or maybe it's because I feel claustrophobic in them. I'm not a huge fan of them. However, that doesn't mean I don't enter them.

Earlier this week my oldest son Noah and I took a trip to the Karangahake Gorge, where we met up with a friend and his oldest son, and set off on an adventure around the different walks, the old mines and shafts that are there. If you haven't been before, I recommend checking it out. There are some of the old foundations of the original buildings still, facts all around about how things operated, amazing walkways to explore, and even glow worms in some of the old mines. Noah loved them!

We made it back after one of the walks and then decided to go and do the tunnel walkway.
(SLIDE 1)

It's also a cycle way, and plenty of cyclists ride in the tunnel as well. Now, the tunnel is probably about a kilometre or a bit longer, and as with most tunnels it's pretty black and dark (Funny that), with a few orange lights beaming from the top, and at the very end of the tunnel you can make out a little bit of daylight.

I wouldn't say I was comfortable, but I was in the tunnel trying to enjoy myself – walking pretty quickly mind you. Noah and his friend would take turns yelling out things and hearing the echoes, then they would shine their torches on the walls and all around the tunnel, enjoying the journey. So we're in the tunnel and I'm thinking we're all good so far.

But what really got me thinking was these little hatches that were dug into the side of the tunnel as you walked along.

(SLIDE 2)

They weren't very wide or deep, just enough for someone to jump into the hatch if, say, a train came along. They're like escape hatches and probably spaced out about 70-100 metres from each other. Now, obviously there are no trains going through there now, but back in the mining days there would have been trains quite often. And so for the people who were in the tunnel, and they heard a train coming behind them or saw one in front of them, these escape hatches were like freedom, and they would likely take off as fast as possible and look for the closest escape hatch.

Can you imagine how scary that would be? You're walking in the tunnel and you hear a train roaring behind you, so you take off as fast as you can, run for dear life, and head for the nearest escape hatch in the tunnel. And that little escape hatch would be your refuge, in that dark, bleak, black as night, tunnel.

I want to suggest this morning that all of us are walking through tunnels in our own ways.

We don't know what's coming up – even though we can make out a little bit of light in the distance. We don't know how long the tunnel stretches for – we just keep on walking or we rest in it for a while. And we all need those escape hatches for when life becomes too much.

Because it does sometimes, doesn't it?

(SLIDE 3)

If you're new here at OBC we're wham bang in the middle of our series looking at the life of Jesus in the gospel of John. Through the stories we've heard so far Jesus has said Hello I am ... the bread of life, the light of the world, the gate for the sheep, the good shepherd, and today we'll hear another of the seven I am statements that Jesus makes about himself in John's gospel, through a story about death and resurrection.

In this morning's story, life has well and truly become too much for three people involved. Martha, her sister Mary, and most definitely their brother Lazarus. These are three people that Jesus cares a tremendous amount for. They are like family to him. He has spent lots of time with them, shared meals with them, walked in the markets with them, taught them about following God, basically lived everyday life with them.

So He knows them and he cares about them. And they in turn know Him and love Him. But one of them is sick, really sick, and this will turn into a tragedy and test their faith in God and His goodness. Without getting too ahead of ourselves, in the middle of the story Jesus makes a proclamation to Martha, which ultimately brings them and us the hope we need when we feel like we are in the dark tunnel that life so can often be.

We're reading in John chapter 11, verse 1. The Message translation. As we read through the story together this morning, we'll take breaks along the journey. Ready?

(SLIDE 4)

A man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. This was the same Mary who massaged the Lord's feet with aromatic oils and then wiped them with her hair. It was her brother Lazarus who was sick. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Master, the one you love so very much is sick."

When Jesus got the message, he said, "This sickness is not fatal. It will become an occasion to show God's glory by glorifying God's Son."

So from the outset we get a clue into Jesus' mind set here. He doesn't seem worried that Lazarus is sick. When Jesus hears the report about Lazarus' illness, He acknowledges that this sickness is not fatal, and actually it will result in bringing glory to God. This is a **very** important part of the story. The tragedy is not by God's design, but God will use it for an opportunity to glorify, or honour, his Son.

(SLIDE 5)

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, but oddly, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed on where he was for two more days.

This can seem a bit harsh, even uncaring from Jesus' perspective. The man he loves is sick and Jesus decides to stay two extra days. Think if you had a loved one in your life who is very unwell, would you wait to go see them, or would you drop everything to be with them. Jesus waits where He is.

(SLIDE 6)

After the two days, he said to his disciples, "Let's go back to Judea."

They said, "Rabbi, you can't do that. The Jews are out to kill you, and you're going back?"

Jesus replied, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in daylight doesn't stumble because there's plenty of light from the sun. Walking at night, he might very well stumble because he can't see where he's going."

Remember that Jesus has described himself as "the light" earlier. For one of His followers, to walk in daylight means to walk in step with the work of Jesus. So long as they are with him – and since he understands the "hours" of his life and work – they can be confident that he will guide them through this treacherous trip to Judea. But the reference to "twelve hours" means much more than this. "Twelve hours" signifies the time given by the Father for the earthly ministry of Jesus. During this time, neither He nor his disciples can be harmed. However, when darkness falls, another 'hour' will have come, the hour of the Cross. Jesus must move to Bethany because He knows that the night is coming.

(SLIDE 7)

He said these things, and then announced, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. I'm going to wake him up."

The disciples said, "Master, if he's gone to sleep, he'll get a good rest and wake up feeling fine." Jesus was talking about death, while his disciples thought he was talking about taking a nap.

(SLIDE 8)

Then Jesus became explicit: "Lazarus died. And I am glad for your sakes that I wasn't there. You're about to be given new grounds for believing. Now let's go to him."

That's when Thomas, the one called the Twin, said to his companions, "Come along. We might as well die with him."

The disciples don't get it at first. They think Lazarus is just having a good kip to sleep away the sickness. They often don't get what Jesus says to them. So He makes it clearer to them and says that it's good He wasn't there, as now they will be given new grounds for believing. I don't think Thomas knew exactly what he was saying here. But Jesus offers no rebuke or further explanation. Thomas doesn't realise what's going to happen with Lazarus. My guess is that none of the other disciples know either.

(SLIDE 9)

When Jesus finally got there, he found Lazarus already four days dead.

This is significant. There was a well-known Jewish belief that the soul of a dead person remained in the vicinity “hoping to re-enter it” for three days, but once decomposition set in, the soul departed. By saying four days, John wants us to know clearly that Lazarus is truly dead and that the miracle of Jesus cannot be understood as simply a resuscitation. This wasn’t one of those “Was he dead, wasn’t he dead” situations. Lazarus was well and truly dead. Four days in. And decomposition had well and truly set in.

(SLIDE 10)

Bethany was near Jerusalem, only a couple of miles away, and many of the Jews were visiting Martha and Mary, sympathizing with them over their brother. Martha heard Jesus was coming and went out to meet him. Mary remained in the house.

Martha said, “Master, if you’d been here, my brother wouldn’t have died. Even now, I know that whatever you ask God he will give you.”

Jesus, if only you had been here ... how many of us have prayed prayers like that? Jesus if only you had been here, my family member would not have died, I wouldn’t have lost my job or house, I would’ve known the right choice to make, my son or daughter would not have done what they did, my marriage would not have failed.

Martha is not questioning Jesus’ goodness, nor is she necessarily having a crisis of faith, for she refers to him as Master. Jesus is still the Lord of her life, but she’s letting him know she is despondent that He was not there, because then her brother would not have died. Jesus would have healed him. But now it’s too late. Or is it? She says to Jesus, “even now, I know that whatever you ask God he will give you.” Martha is not bargaining here, she’s commenting on God’s willingness to answer Jesus. She’s saying, “What can you do for us?”

(SLIDE 11)

Jesus said, “Your brother will be raised up.”

Martha replied, “I know that he will be raised up in the resurrection at the end of time.”

Here we come to the crux of the story and the heart of God and His plan for all people.

(SLIDE 12)

“You don’t have to wait for the End. I am the Resurrection and the Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all.

(SLIDE 13)

Jesus claims to be **the** Resurrection and **the** Life. This is a bold, even outrageous claim. In other words, eternal life and rescue from the finality of death are not merely gifts obtained by appealing to God; they are aspects of what it means to live a life in Christ. If Jesus is life, then those who believe in him will enjoy the confidence and power over death known by Him. Life will be theirs beyond the grave; they will not suffer death in eternity.

Moreover, they will have life now and do not have to wait till the end of human time and history in order to enjoy the benefits.

(SLIDE 14)

Subtitle: **Eternal Life starts now.** Once you commit yourself to following Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit, the old life is gone and the new life is here. Sure, you may still struggle but the new life has begun.

So Jesus is saying to Martha and to us: Eternal Life starts now. I am the resurrection and the life. This must have fully reoriented Martha's faith. To believe in Him is not only to be assured about the resurrection at the last day but to experience here and now something of eternal life.

Such a believer, though he or she must pass through physical death, as Lazarus has done, will go on living; and no-one who has faith in Jesus can ever perish.

This is a lot to take in - for Martha and for us. So Jesus asks a question:

(SLIDE 15)

Do you believe this?"

Martha responds:

"Yes, Master. All along I have believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who comes into the world."

I wonder what your answer might be to Jesus if he asked you the same question.

(SLIDE 16)

Do you believe I am the resurrection and the life, and that everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all?

For some of us, we find that question easy to answer. For others, it's pretty tough. Some of us really want to believe but we struggle because of what we or those we love have been through, or promises that have not worked out, or prayers that have not been answered, or journeys which have been through very dark tunnels.

The good news is that God is extremely patient and won't force Himself on anyone. In fact He Himself came to this world through the person of Jesus. To reveal Himself so that people didn't have to go looking for Him. As Brian preached about last week, Jesus is the good shepherd who is both looking *after* and looking *for* His sheep. He doesn't want people to believe in Him out of fear or duty. He wants people to believe in him out of choice and love.

We pick up the story in verse 33:

(SLIDE 17)

When Jesus saw Mary sobbing and the Jews with her sobbing, a deep anger welled up within him. He said, "Where did you put him?"

"Master, come and see," they said. Now Jesus wept.

The Jews said, "Look how deeply he loved him."

(SLIDE 18)

Others among them said, "Well, if he loved him so much, why didn't he do something to keep him from dying? After all, he opened the eyes of a blind man."

Then Jesus, the anger again welling up within him, arrived at the tomb. It was a simple cave in the hillside with a slab of stone laid against it. Jesus said, "Remove the stone."

Why is Jesus angry? Why is he outraged in the deepest level of his being? He is certainly not angry at Martha, Mary, or their mourners. Rather, he is overcome by the futility of this sorrowful scene in light of the reality of the resurrection. God's people possess knowledge of life; they should possess a faith that claims victory at the grave. But here they stand, overcome in seeming defeat. And here stands the One in whom victory, life, and resurrection are powerful realities. Jesus is angry at death itself and its devastation.

Jesus' tears are not for Lazarus, whose resurrection from the grave is imminent and whose life is going to show God's glory. Jesus knows what good surprises are in store for his good friend! Jesus' tears are connected to the anger he is feeling so deeply. The public chaos surrounding him, the loud wailing and crying, the scene of a cemetery and its reminder of death – all the result of sin and death – together these produce outrage in the Son of God as he works to reverse such damage.

And the time has come for the biggest miracle so far in his life.

(SLIDE 19)

The sister of the dead man, Martha, said, "Master, by this time there's a stench. He's been dead four days!"

Jesus looked her in the eye. "Didn't I tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

Then, to the others, "Go ahead, take away the stone."

(SLIDE 20)

They removed the stone. Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and prayed, "Father, I'm grateful that you have listened to me. I know you always do listen, but on account of this crowd standing here I've spoken so that they might believe that you sent me."

Then he shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" And he came out, a cadaver, wrapped from head to toe, and with a kerchief over his face.

Jesus told them, "Unwrap him and let him loose."

Jesus suffered much agony of spirit as He approached the grave of his friend to bring him back to life and display the glory of God – which he promised to his disciples earlier. Lazarus is raised to life. Jesus proves to Martha and all there that He is the resurrection and the life. He can be trusted with our lives – and our deaths too for that matter.

He will bring new life to those who choose to believe in Him and follow Him. Jesus is master over death. The last and final enemy. And He was destined to suffer the same agony in the garden of Gethsemane when his 'twelve hours' were up before moving on to Calvary to the Cross to conquer the sting of death once and for all.

(SLIDE 21)

Jesus is the resurrection and the life; the vanquisher of sin and death. He went through the dark tunnel of the Cross, endured all the beatings, the mocking, the nails hammered into his hands and feet, and then the torment of being crucified. Make no mistake, this was the darkest tunnel ever and there was no escape hatch at that time. Jesus suffered and died. As Lazarus died, so too the Son of God died on that Cross. And the light went dim.

But it didn't remain dim. It grew brighter and no one had to tell Jesus to come forth from his grave. He rose again—victorious! He overcame the grave. He overcame sin. He overcame death. He is the resurrection and the life.

(SLIDE 22)

And that can help us in the dark tunnels that we face.

Instead of focusing on the darkness of the tunnel around us, we can look for those escape hatches along the way, where we can breathe and gather a new perspective on life.

(SLIDE 23)

But as I found walking along the tunnel earlier in the week, the greatest hope was focusing on that little bit of light at the end of the tunnel. And as we edged ever closer to the end of the tunnel, that light grew brighter and bigger and bolder. And so did I. I'm a little less scared of tunnels now, because I know that the darkness will fade, the light will get stronger and it will keep us going. The light brings new life.

Jesus is that light - the resurrection and the life, and because of this we have a certain future, and can have confidence in life everlasting.

Let's pray.