6 – 12 of April 2014: Fifth Sunday of Lent

Gospel Jn 11:1-45

Mary and Martha sent this message to Jesus, ‘Lord, the man you love is ill.’ On receiving the message, Jesus said, ‘This sickness will end not in death but in God’s glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified.’ Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that Lazarus was ill he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judea.’

On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to sympathise with them over their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus had come she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, ‘If you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you.’ ‘Your brother’ said Jesus to her ‘will rise again.’ Martha said, ‘I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said: ‘I am the resurrection and the life.If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ she said ‘I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.’

Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, ‘Where have you put him?’ They said, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept; and the Jews said, ‘See how much he loved him!’ But there were some who remarked, ‘He opened the eyes of the blind man, could he not have prevented this man’s death?’ Still sighing, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, ‘Take the stone away.’ Martha said to him, ‘Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day.’ Jesus replied, ‘Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?’ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said: ‘Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer. I knew indeed that you always hear me, but I speak for the sake of all these who stand round me, so that they may believe it was you who sent me.’ When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, here! Come out!’ The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, let him go free.’

Unbind him let him go free

This week’s Gospel gives us a variety of themes to explore. However the one I am going to focus has to do with this idea of healing. The bodily raising of Lazarus would be difficult to dispute, especially if you had been there and seen it with your own eyes. 2000 years later what are we meant to do with a story about Jesus “taking care of his mates,”? Clearly this is more significant than changing out a flat tyre or watching someone’s dog when they go out of town for the weekend! Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead!

What strikes me about this story now is how familiar the elements are and yet in our lives today are often reluctant to believe it if we see it, and if we do see it, we are not very likely to let it change our lives in appreciable fashions.

When someone in your life has lost your trust, even for very good reasons, is there anything that would help you bring them back into your circle of trust? Jesus prays for a miracle to be worked in Lazarus, and when that happens, people come to believe. Metaphorically, when he is raised, people still need to unbind him. When God works miracles in peoples’ lives it still holds true that people, that means you and me, need to be prepared to unbind them from the things in their past that haunt them.

Questioning words

Is there someone in your community that has turned their life around and still hasn’t been welcomed back? What is something you could do this week that would help to unbind them from their past? What’s stopping you from taking that step?