

Worship Material
Sunday 26th March 2023
Jesus Wept
Materials from Roots Bible Study

Begin with an opening prayer

Loving God,
we thank you for sending us your Son, Jesus.
Help us to see that he shared this earthly life fully,
its joys and sorrows, triumphs and defeats, bliss and pain.
May we draw comfort from the knowledge
that he is with us in good times and bad,
and understands all our experiences.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Amen.

Read John 11.1-45

Bible notes

This is the last and greatest of the signs in John, by which Jesus reveals, 'I am the resurrection and the life.' Its climax is Jesus' command, 'Lazarus, come out!' The crowd will shout out for Jesus' death (19.6,15), but in Jesus' shout we hear God's life-giving Word. We have obdurate male disciples, thinking Jesus will awaken Lazarus by rousing him from slumber, and perceptive female followers. Martha expresses the belief in Jesus that brings life in his name (see 20.31), and Mary leads Jesus to the tomb, anticipating anointing him for his own impending burial (12.1-8). The sign affects the judgement for which Jesus came into the world (9.39). While many of his own Jewish people who were present believe, their leaders now plot to put both Jesus (11.53) and Lazarus (12.10) to death. Lazarus, like his sisters, is presented as both a friend and a disciple of Jesus. The little we are told about him is highly significant. Lazarus both loves and is loved by Jesus, and Lazarus welcomes Jesus into his home (12.1-2). His love for these siblings may explain why Jesus is so deeply moved and begins to weep when the grieving Mary comes to meet him, and this is what some of those present assume. But from the outset Jesus knows that he will raise Lazarus for God's glory, delaying his arrival until Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days. And, despite this, he is disturbed again when he comes to the tomb and says, 'Take away the stone.' All this foreshadows his own death and resurrection, and it may be that his disturbance, his weeping, and his prayer at the tomb, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me' are John's equivalent of the other Gospels' account of Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. And if he is weeping also for his friends, it is perhaps because he knows what the cost of their faithfulness will be, something Thomas has already glimpsed as he urges his fellow disciples to go with Jesus to Lazarus' tomb, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

This is a difficult passage for us to come to terms with. It is not within our experience for people to come back to life after they have been dead for four days. The nearest we come to it is when people are revived or resuscitated in the moments following a trauma or accident. So, we may have different responses to this story. Do we believe it at face value, or do we seek other explanations? A more important consideration, perhaps, is how John uses it to emphasise the transformation that Jesus can bring - as we might ask also of other 'signs' that Jesus performed, e.g. turning water into wine, multiplying loaves and fishes. In this story Jesus is no outsider. He is fully involved with the sadness of the situation, he wept. When Jesus offers us transformation, he comes beside us as a friend who know all about our struggles.

Prayer

A sorrow shared is a sorrow halved.
We have seen the closeness of Lazarus and his sisters,
to each other and to you, Lord Jesus.
We thank you that, through you,
we too can have that shared experience.
Thank you that in our time of grief,
however long it takes, you are there.
Thank you that you can bring new life to us.
And thank you most of all for the gift of eternal life.
Amen.

A prayer to conclude

Lord, be with us on our journey of life.
As we travel with you in the coming days,
may we share your love and compassion
with those we meet whose path is hard.
Transform us, and transform them, with your life-giving love.
Amen.