

Passion Sunday 2011

Bones
revivifying
bringing to life

every day
hope

darkest hour before dawn

Jesus wept

Jesus wept" (John 11.35). Again, it is the Greek word that makes the connection. John uses a verb that is found nowhere else in the New Testament, though as a noun it is used in the Letter to the Hebrews to describe the Passion of Jesus: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death" (Hebrews 5.7). In the death of Lazarus, Jesus sees his own death prefigured. We have a sense, rather as at the wedding in Cana, that he cannot be forced into the revealing of that hour of glory ahead of its proper time. The tears that Jesus sheds at the tomb of Lazarus prefigure the dark moments of self-consecration in the Garden of Gethsemane. They express the cost of obedience to the Father's will, and a deep sense of compassion blended with outrage that death should so disfigure the beauty of God's intention for life in its perfection as the destiny of creation.

Tears at the death of Lazarus, tears in the Passion, tears as an expression of the world's woe — these are potent images, and we use them in the 17th-century Passiontide hymn by Phineas Fletcher, "Drop, drop, slow tears". Its final verse asks that the Prince of Peace will see human sin only through the veil of our tears. Fletcher makes no allusion to the story of Lazarus and the tears of Jesus which connect him with our human experience of sorrow.

Today's Gospel prepares us for Holy Week. Bring tear-stained faces to the Easter tomb, and be awakened into new life. Dare to believe that it is just possible.

What does it mean?

God became man and suffered all men's woes. We didn't ask him to. **That is love.** Through the incarnation, life and crucifixion of Jesus, God enters into all human experience: *God enters man. That is love.* Through the resurrection man is reborn – a constant cycle of death followed by resurrection: eternal regeneration, eternal Eucharist, re-incarnation. *Man enters God. That is love.* We fall short, repent and are forgiven – crucifixion immediately followed by resurrection. Without repentance there is no resurrection, merely an increasing dis-ease precipitating ill-health.

Jesus tells each one of us to take up our cross.

not so much going to find a cause then taking it up, but living in the present – what you have with you now. Living in the present.

And when do we see this Jesus who will instruct us?

Jesus in everyone

Disadvantaged people are prophets in – people who reveal our values, make us uncomfortable.

So Jesus is Love, and let us never think we are too sinful or unprepared to meet him.

Prodigal father

Jesus is love and love takes many forms so Jesus takes many forms. It guides but does not insist. It stands alongside. It surprises. It is sometimes angry – hatred of wrongdoing. It is not always 'nice' and it is never bland or anodyne. This sounds like the hymn to love in 1 Corinthians. That is what Jesus is like. And we can see him if we try in every situation and every person. Jesus and love are often unseen until they have gone – like the road to Emmaus.

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, he came to those men who did not know who he was. He says the same words, 'Follow me!', and sets us to those tasks which he must fulfil in our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether wise or unwise, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the suffering that they may experience in his fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.

Let us pray, after St Patrick.

May the strength of God pilot us.

May the power of God preserve us.

May the wisdom of God instruct us.

May the hand of God protect us.

May the way of God direct us.

May the shield of God defend us.

May the host of god guard us against the snares of evil and temptations of the world.

May Christ be with us.

Christ above us.

Christ in us.

Christ before us.

May your salvation, O Lord, be always ours this day and for evermore, **Amen.**