

Do you believe this?

[Ezekiel 37¹⁻¹⁴; Psalm 130;] Romans 8⁶⁻¹¹; John 11¹⁻⁴⁵

Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' [John 11²⁶⁻²⁷]

Miss Wood and Miss Watson were Dreadnaught's of women. In my youth they were the Superintendents of the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen. They were instantly recognisable in their naval style uniforms, complete with brass buttons and their trio run hats (and if rank were judge by chest size, they were Admirals!). Miss Wood dealt with inebriated fishermen by preaching at them and Miss Watson took a different approach - she played her harp and sang. When they appeared on This is Your Life they were asked how they coped with that part of their role that involved breaking the news to a family that their loved one had been lost at sea. Miss Wood, in the native Doric tongue simply said, 'Ye gist haud their haun and greet!' You hold their hand and cry!

Last Sunday we became painful aware that even that isn't an option for us now. We *saw* people, but we couldn't touch: no hugs for mothers; no handshakes for families; no embracing grandchildren. In an instant the reality, the gravity, of the current situation became even more real.

The Gospel reading teaches us that Jesus was then, as he is now, fully prepared to enter into the pain and grief that a family feel.

- ✦ The fact that he held back was incomprehensible to his disciples and to Mary and Martha.
- ✦ He knew, as we are learning, that it is possible to do nothing and for that to be the right thing.
- ✦ Perhaps, like those present in Bethany we want to challenge God in Christ and say about our current crisis, **Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?** We see things from our perspective and not through the eyes of the one who, uniquely, **began to weep.**

This week I officiated at the funeral of a friend, Roger Tracey. Under normal circumstances it would have been one of those 300+ funerals drawing on a life well lived and very much appreciated, sharing tales of generosity and fellowship (it was

Roger who introduced me to the delights of black whisky). Instead of the gathering befitting the man, only the immediate family gathered. Even had more wanted to be there, the Crematorium had set a limit of 25 at any rate with the seating starkly arranged to ensure proper distancing.

Yet in the disappointment of the family in Nuneaton together with the family in Bethany, one thing shines through for them and for us all:

I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. And then the challenge: **Do you believe this?**

Faith isn't the thing that we hold, it is the thing that holds us. Even when resuscitations in this life don't happen - though it doesn't stop us praying for those who are ill - our hope in and for the resurrection stands firm. We know, as we follow our Lord, that our path may lead us to our own cross before we know the reality of the endless hope that isn't a hopeless end.

If the normal congregation had been here I would have asked them to tell me when Jesus said, **Don't touch me!** That was, of course, to Mary after the resurrection. So even our non-contact can be come to us a reminder of the hope resurrection that will lighten this current darkness

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