**Daily Prayer & Encouragement Sunday 27th December –** Steve Deall

John 11: 1-7

A man by the name of Lazarus was sick in the village of Bethany. He had two sisters, Mary and Martha. This was the same Mary who later poured perfume on the Lord’s head and wiped his feet with her hair. The sisters sent a message to the Lord and told him that his good friend Lazarus was sick.When Jesus heard this, he said, “His sickness won’t end in death. It will bring glory to God and his Son.”

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and brother. But he stayed where he was for two more days.Then he said to his disciples, “Now we will go back to Judea.”

I remember my last triathlon club session in March before the first lockdown started. People were generally saying ‘take care, see you in 3 months’. There haven’t been any sessions since! This is a fairly trivial example of things not working out in the way or within the timescale we hoped for.

Today’s passage gives a rather more shocking and seemingly catastrophic example of delay. Lazarus, who we are told was ‘a good friend’ of Jesus, is sick, and yet instead of Jesus going to help him, he ‘stayed where he was for two more days’.

When Jesus ‘finally’ arrives on the scene, Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days. Jewish understanding held that the spirit of a person left after 3 days, and so there is added significance to this passage of time. Both Mary and Martha separately say to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died’.

Jesus has already revealed to his disciples that “Lazarus’s sickness won’t end in death. It will bring glory to God and his Son.” However, it is comforting that, despite knowing the ultimate outcome, we see that Jesus is deeply moved by the suffering and loss caused by Lazarus’s death. Not only did he weep, but we are later told he ‘was still terribly upset.’

Ultimately Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb. Not only is there a resurrection but a mini-revival as ‘many of the people who had come to visit Mary … put their faith in him.’ The climax of the chapter (worth reading all of to get a fuller picture than I’ve given) is an amazing miracle, but lots is revealed by the way Jesus chooses to get there.

As we continue to wrestle with God in the midst of our current challenges, let us remember:-

1) that Jesus has a much bigger agenda than we do and his ultimate goal (and our ultimate good) is that we have faith in him, know his love and see his glory.

2) He is deeply interested in and moved by our pain, suffering and loss.

3) His resurrection power is able to bring new life, even in the face of death.

***Lord Jesus, thank you that You know what it is to be human and that You care deeply about the challenges that we face. Grow our faith so we may have increased confidence to ask You to be acting on our behalf, but also give us the ability to trust Your goodness and surrender to Your will when You are either saying ‘no’ or not working in the way or to the timescale we would like. Amen.***