**SEVEN QUESTIONS**

**Week of Monday 16th March 2020**

**Opening**: Think of a time in your life when things seemed hopeless. How did you make it through? What new opportunities presented themselves?

**Bible reading:** John 11: 1-45

*A note: Many of the insights that helped form the questions for this week’s study come from the work of Lutheran minister Rev Brian Stoffregen who writes for CrossMarks Christian Resources.*

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1. As some writers have noted, it is quite possible that Mary and Martha, as single women, were dependent upon Lazarus. His death would be more than just the loss of a brother but of their means of living. In light of that insight, we can tie the anxiety of Mary and Martha to our concern right now as COVID-19 sets itself to compromise the means of living of so many. *How does this insight affect your reading of the passage?*
2. In this passage, there is an issue of timing. Jesus sticks around for a few more days. In a lectionary passage a few weeks back, Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath – inviting fury from religious leaders – when waiting a day would’ve made no difference. As Bultmann notes, ‘The work of Jesus has its own hour’. *How is the timing of Jesus both a challenge to us and an assurance for us?*
3. Jesus arrives on the fourth day. Traditionally, people in the ancient world believed that the spirit of a dead body hovered for three days; by the fourth day, all hope of resurrection was gone. This is, quite literally, a hopeless situation. *What is this telling us about the power of Jesus and the reality of hope?*
4. DEPTH DISCIPLESHIP QUESTION: Jesus’ response to news of Lazarus’ death is perplexing. He says he is not dead when he is dead! But death for Jesus is not physical death; it is life disconnected from God, which is a reality on either side of life and death. For Jesus, this spiritual connection is the most important thing; it eclipses by far the lesser issue of physical life (a truth we as humans struggle to come to terms with). *In what ways is a life connected to God qualitatively different from life disconnected from God? How does a connection to God elevate us from merely existing to truly living?*
5. In this passage, more than nearly any other (except for possibly the temple scene), Jesus is emotional. And it is a range of emotion – there is irritation, and there is sadness. Famously, it is here that ‘Jesus wept’. (I grew up believing this was the ‘shortest verse in scripture’. As it happens, it is not; that honour falls to 1 Thess. 5:16, which has only two words and fourteen letters; the phrase ‘Jesus wept’ contains three words and sixteen letters.)

*Jesus did not weep for the passing of Lazarus for he knew his resurrection was imminent. Why did he weep? What does this tell us about the heart of God? What does this tell us about the heart of a disciple?*

1. The image of death and life is a pervasive one in scripture. Lazarus had no role to play other than to receive God-given life. A call to faith is a call to die so that we might be reborn. As it was put, by CS Lewis, I think: ‘Nothing that does not die can be reborn.’ *What is the struggle for us in this birth-death-new life cycle in which we find ourselves? In what ways do you personally struggle to die? In what ways do we as believers generally struggle? If you died to these things, what new life might lie beyond for you?*
2. Rev Brian Stoffregen asks an intriguing question: *How would Lazarus’ life have changed after this event? What do you think he would’ve done? Could you see him spending more time at home with the family? How might his priorities have shifted? In light of an ‘air of change and dying’ around us now, through COVID-19 and the resultant loss of life and pervasive fear, what similar lessons should we be learning?*

**Amen**. The prayers write themselves in this season. Spend a considerable time offering to God thoughts, impressions, issues relating to COVID-19 and the Coronavirus.

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