

Good News! I have good news for you: God has a resurrection plan just for you! God wants to bring us out into the light again. He wants to bring us out of our tombs of oppression and give you a new start. What’s more; God has the power to do it, he can give us all a new life! The powerful story in John 11 speaks of this. Lets quickly recap: Mary and Martha who live in Bethany are among Jesus’ closest friends, and they send word to him that their brother Lazarus, is desperately ill. *Please come quickly, we need your help because Lazarus is fading fast.* By the time Jesus gets there, Lazarus has died and has been buried for four days. Mary and Martha come out to meet Jesus and naturally, they express their grief and their disappointment in Jesus: *We’ve lost him, Lord. If only you’d been here, Lazarus wouldn’t have died.*

The family and friends have gathered and in their mourning and they weep over the loss of their loved one. Jesus’ heart goes out to them, and He weeps with them. He knew Lazarus and he shares their pain. Jesus goes out to the tomb and tells them: *Roll back the stone!* Martha, always the realist protests: *Lord, we can’t do that. He has been in the grave for four days there will be a terrible odour by now.* But Jesus says to her: *Martha, only believe and you will see the power of God.* So they roll the stone away, and Jesus commands: *Lazarus, come out!* And incredibly and miraculously, before their very eyes; Lazarus is resurrected! He comes out of the tomb, and he’s still wearing his grave clothes, his body and head are wrapped in cloths, so Jesus instructs his friends and family: *Unbind him and let him go. Unwrap him and set him free.*

In this graphic and dramatic story, three lessons jump out at us. Three great truths emerge which can be so helpful to us today. Let me list them: **1. Jesus wept with those he loved and He still does. 2. Jesus raised people up and He still does. 3. Jesus**

*included others in the healing process, and He still does.*

*First: Jesus wept with those He loved, and he still does.* John 11:35 is the shortest verse in the Bible: ***Jesus wept!*** That verse served me well when I was in primary school. Our teacher would start the day with a short bible lesson and we would get a toffee if we could quote a verse of scripture, and this was my star-producing verse! Miss Peterkin, our teacher would ask: *Can anyone tell me a verse of scripture this morning?* My hand would go up immediately: *Miss, John 11:35 - Jesus wept!* I only got away with that twice before Miss Peterkin asked: Does anyone know a verse apart from John 11:35!

At the end of a minister's training, we do an eighteen month probation placement with an experienced minister supervising us. I am convinced that one of the purposes of our probation placement is to put trainees in situations where we learn that we don't have all the answers. At the end of our training ministers can have a tendency to think they know it all, and are ready to solve all the problems of the world. During my probation, I was left to cover the parish because my supervisor was on holiday. I took a call from the son of our senior elder, to tell me the elder had died that morning.

As I left the house to visit the family it occurred to me that I didn't know what to do, and I admit I was scared because I didn't know what to say to them. I tried to remember my pastoral care classes. I tried to recall appropriate scripture passages to quote. I searched my mind for some profound theological message to say to the family in their hour of need. I considered quoting the 23rd Psalm and explaining that God is always with us. I arrived at the house, the family were together in the living room, and I looked at their faces. Their pain was so obvious it became my pain. I was surprised how infectious people's pain is at times like these, and I almost became overcome with emotion. And the family noticed this, and we just sat in silence because no words were necessary.

I finally asked them how they were which seemed stupid looking back, and we arranged for me to call to back to discuss the funeral. When Gordon returned I explained that I felt embarrassed and ashamed, and I felt I'd failed miserably. Gordon told me that I'd done okay, but I wasn't convinced and I was always embarrassed when I saw the elders family.

When I was leaving Claremont at the end of my probation placement, the elders daughter asked me to call round to see the family before I left. I was dreading the visit but I couldn't get out of it. When I called they wanted to let me know how much that visit on the morning their dad died meant to them. Oh really, I thought with genuine surprise. She said: *We'll never forget how you came and cried with us when Dad died!* That was such an important lesson for me. When people are in grief they don't want grand theological pronouncements. They just want us to come and love them, they just want us to come and cry with them.

*Jesus wept with those He loveds and He still does. He hurts with us, he feels our pain.* We all face suffering some time, and when it comes, one thing we can know is that our Lord is hurting with us, and He will love us through it. He will walk through the valley with us, and in time He will bring us out of that valley to the mountaintop on the other side. Jesus wept with those he loved and he still does.

***Secondly: Jesus raised people up, and He still does.*** There's another minister who learned a valuable lesson while completing his training, and that was Rev D L Dykes, who was a campaigner for civil rights in America in the last 1950s. He wrote that when he was a student pastor, he really wanted to learn how to do things right. So each time he had to do something new, he would read the Bible and find out what Jesus did. He did

his best to learn from Jesus, who is the ultimate teacher.

All went well until Dykes had to do his first funeral. He turned to the New Testament only to discover that Jesus never performed any funerals, Jesus only did resurrections! Here in John chapter eleven, Jesus resurrects Lazarus. He raises him up and brings him out of the tomb: *Lazarus, come forth* Jesus says. See how personal this is! Jesus calls Lazarus by name. The Bible teaches us that God knows each of us by name, and that He has counted every hair on our heads. Jesus knows each one of us intimately, and there are times when if we listen carefully, we can hear him calling our name.

*Jesus has a resurrection for us, and He wants to bring us out of whatever tomb it is that's imprisoning us. We speak figuratively of this tomb and it represents anything that stops us being what or who we could be. Our tomb may be our fears, our negative views of ourselves, our belief that our inadequacies outweigh our abilities. Jesus wants to set us free, and He has the power to do it.* If we will hear his call and respond in faith, He will raise us up and give each of us a new start, a new chance and a new life. Jesus wept with those he loved, and He still does. Jesus raised people up and He still does!

**Third and finally, *Jesus included other people in the healing process, and He still does!*** Don't miss this: Notice what happens when Lazarus comes out of the tomb. Jesus turns to his family and friends and says: *Unbind him and let him go. Unwrap him and set him free.* I find it amazing that some people think that Christians meeting in small groups is a new thing. Christians meeting in small groups is as old as the Bible, and the earliest church was just that, Christians meeting in small groups. And these groups are so essential. Jesus knew how important it is to have our family and our friends helping us, supporting and encouraging us. At times, setting us free by supporting and working with us when we are trying to make a new start with our lives. The support, faith and

Christians love has helped many move on in their lives.

The healing of Lazarus gives to us insights into how the power of God breaks in to people's lives a different levels. There is the power of God which raises a dead man and brings him back to life. And there is the power of God which we see working through people who care and have a God given love for others. This is what the healing ministry is all about. There are Christians who following Christ's example, have such a concern for people that they are given the gift of healing through the Holy Spirit. In the story of Lazarus, we see the loved ones of Lazarus invited by Jesus to care for him, to take care of his very human needs and to provide the care and attention that he would have needed at the moment. Lazarus is healed by the power of Jesus in the most incredible and amazing way, yet this healing is also demonstrated through the loving acts of his family and friends. Jesus included other people in the healing process, and He still does!

Jesus wept with those he loved, and he still does. He raised people up, and He still does. He included others in the healing process; and He still does. This is the Good News of Christ. We celebrate the resurrection of Christ on Easter Sunday, but Jesus Christ is in the resurrecting business every day through His healing touch, His raising up of those who are down, through giving Spiritual gifts to His people and including them in His work, as a witness and an affirming of them as people. Today have read that Jesus raised Lazarus, today we proclaim that Christ is risen and today we acknowledge that Christ can resurrect us! Praise the Lord! **Amen**

*(1807 words)*