

All Saints 2018

Isaiah 25.6-9; Psalm 24.1; John 11.32-44

‘The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth.

Jesus said to them “unbind him and let him go”. John 11.44

The story of the raising of Lazarus is an amazing and wonderful one. It shows the humanity of Jesus, his love and compassion for his friends – and his own need for human friendship. It also shows his power over the gift of life itself and his authority as Creator. Lazarus was freed not only of the shrouds of death but of death itself.

The resurrection of Lazarus was a foretaste of what was to come in the conquering of death by Jesus through his own sacrificial death and resurrection. A cosmic battle had to be fought and won and Jesus did that. Isaiah says that the Lord will

*‘destroy on this mountain the shroud
that is cast over all peoples,
The sheet that is spread over all nations’*

The fear of death and death itself certainly is paralyzing for many people. We fear to think about it or talk about it and when it happens to someone we love we are indeed cloaked with this pall of sorrow and darkness.

That must be how Lazarus' sisters Mary and Martha felt. It is how many who live with grief feel. Knowledge of the resurrection does not take that pain away – but it does mean that we bear our sadness with hope.

In the story we have before us today, Jesus removes the physical shrouds that held the dead man Lazarus and he removed the shrouds that clung to the hearts of Martha and Mary. That is the resurrection hope that we share at Easter time. Death is defeated.

The theologian Harry Williams once said, "*At All Saints, Easter opens up like a fan to include everyone*".

I think he meant that at this festival we stand together as the company of those who have heard the words of Jesus: '*unbind him and let him go*'. We have been loosed from the chains of death and freed from the fear of death along with all those who have gone before us and all who will come after us.

As part of the company of the redeemed we live as people with bi-focal vision – we are called to show in our lives that God is real and active – that God is with us and therefore we will not fear.

But we also are those who look beyond what we can see to what is unseen and hoped for.... The consummation of God's rule over all of creation, when God will be all in all and death will be finally cast off forever.

When we look at our own lives we may feel rather like Lazarus – *bound up in nature's night* as the hymn writer said. Our shrouds might be fear or anxiety; or we may feel empty, inadequate, unworthy of our calling to be saints.

Today we claim our place with the Saints in light and speak the truth over ourselves that while we may be weak, as God's children our shroud has been taken off, we can now see clearly so that we can rise up and follow Jesus wherever he may lead us.

Amen.