

## **Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg**

**Evensong on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

**Text: John 11:17-44**

Every act of terror perpetrated against those going about their peaceful day by day life is an affront to all that is decent, compassionate and humane

So often, as we see pictures and biographies of the victims there is a terrible randomness, a network of strangers whose lives become tragically interwoven as their individual stories intersect in the same place at the same

But often the choosing of targets is carefully done, not just for security reasons, but for the symbolic blow to be dealt against the values or the faith against which the terrorist wishes to rant and rail

The bombings on Easter morning in the churches and hotels in Sri Lanka were horribly well timed and horribly well executed – not just because of the large numbers gathered in single locations

But the symbolic gesture of peddling and glorifying death in the midst of a celebration of life

THE question of practical theology, the theology that starts not with abstract doctrine but concrete life lived from the perspective of faith, THE question is: where is God in all of this?

That is the question that has to be asked

That is the question that enables us to start to do the instinctive thing of gently holding a tragedy before God in prayer – not to tell Him what He ought to be doing, but as the simple, instinctive act of love for another

But how can we do that if we don't know where He is in such moments

Or how can we truly do that if we somehow believe that he sits up and away, remote and removed

And for the terror attacks of Sri Lanka read the floods again in Mozambique, the cyclones battering Indian shores, the family on whose sofa I sat this week – Dad and two young teenagers - a month after taking their Mum's funeral

Where is God in such situations, such moments?

And in our reading this evening from John's gospel we see, I believe, the dawning of an answer: as God in Jesus walks into the "death in the midst of life" of Lazarus, Mary and Martha

The shared lament of both sisters says it all: If you had been here, he would not have died...

Absence

If there is any hope to be had, says Martha, it is in the belief that one day, all shall be well – I know he will rise again

But Jesus is not one to speak in the past or future tenses

Jesus speaks in the present, and he speaks about life in the seventh of the great "I am" claims of John's Gospel, the next great miracle

I am the resurrection and the life

And then standing before the tomb we see this life in the here and now in his two responses to the affront of death in the midst of life

First: v33 says “he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved”

Then in v35, “Jesus began to weep”

Indignation and compassion – indignation towards death, compassion towards its victims

I think the *grk* word for the first is like a horse pawing the ground, an incensed energy, powerful and potent, angered by the temerity of death and angry at anything or anyone who acts as its agents to disrupt, to wreak havoc in people’s lives

But alongside this is the eloquence of tears, compassion for Martha and Mary

And this indignation and compassion combine in these words: Take away the stone

William Temple, commenting on this gesture sees something much greater and also much more personal as he writes, “... the stone which shuts the soul into its tomb of anxiety, or worry or resentment. It involves the exposure of habits grown horrible in their rigidity. But it is the condition of response to the quickening voice.” (Readings in St John’s Gospel, Vol I, p184)

Death and its shadow come in many forms – from the terrorist bomb to my unwillingness and inability to forgive another

But in all situations, the believer’s instinctive question is: where is God?

*Pause*

I suggest always He is “with”, “alongside”, with that Jesus-like mixture of indignation and compassion, longing for us to hear and heed his words to allow Him to “take away the stone ...”