

‘Jesus Wept’

It may be helpful to familiarise yourself with the Gospel passage John 11: 1-44

Many listening to this reflection today will know these two words and know that they describe Jesus’ response to his friend’s Lazarus death. Words charged with human emotion, as Jesus sees Mary (Lazarus’ sister) and those gathered to offer comfort crying tears of grief and despair, he too is deeply moved.

These are not manufactured tears, these are tears of one who shares in human sorrow, the tears of one who is brought up sharply by the fragility of human life .

They are tears of solidarity: the tears of a Messiah who is fully human and as such cannot fail to be moved by the loss of a friend.

Of course, the fact that Jesus wept also teaches us something important about faith.

It reminds us that faith is not a protection against suffering. More than that, it teaches us something about how we are to suffer.

I often think that Christianity does much better at answering the question how we are to suffer than it does with the question of why we suffer.

Jesus suffers with his friends: that is what it means to show compassion, to feel the suffering of others and to be with them in that suffering – not to deny the reality of the suffering, but to be with the one who suffers as a stand against the loneliness and the isolation that suffering brings.

His tears teach us that even for the Son of God, the one who knew himself to be the resurrection and the life, death was still an enemy, a cause of pain. To have faith is not to deny the awful reality of the pain that death can bring to those who are bereaved: in that moment, the one who is the resurrection and the life, shared in the pain of bereavement, knowing that it was very real and powerful. These tears are a rejection of all that is trite and simplistic in some versions of our faith.



Reading this particular passage in Holy Week sensitises us to the awfulness of what lies ahead for Jesus: that the path he has chosen is not some series of easy hoops for him to jump through, but the events of Holy Week represent a real test for him, of which the outcome is no foregone conclusion.

The one who could be moved to tears at the death of a friend is able to feel fear as he anticipates the path that lies before him; he is able to experience the pain of betrayal, to feel the pain of knowing that those who had called themselves his friends deserted him and denied him when the stakes were raised.

I find that those haunting words "Jesus wept" urge me to travel with him – not simply to go from triumphal entry to glorious resurrection, but to try to take on the significance of the way that the Son of God suffered and felt pain as we do: the poignant last supper he shared with his friends; the agony in the garden of Gethsemane as he faced up to what lay before him; the betrayal and denial by his friends, the bleakness of Good Friday.

Those simple words: 'Jesus wept' contain so much about the reality of Christ's embrace of human life with all its pain and weakness: let us resolve to try to travel with him through the poignant events of Holy Week, so that our joy will be real and complete when we come to greet him on Easter morning as the one who truly is the resurrection and the life. Amen.