

31 October 2021

BIBLE READINGS

Revelation 21:1-6a

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling-place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.'

John 11:32-44

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 'Where have you laid him?' he asked. 'Come and see, Lord,' they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 'Take away the stone,' he said. 'But, Lord,' said Martha, the sister of the dead man, 'by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days.' Then Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go.'

MESSAGE - [Giving thanks for those who have inspired and helped us](#)

The reading from John's Gospel is the raising of Lazarus, the event that sets in motion the move of the Jewish leaders against Jesus that leads to his passion and death. It is a scene filled with strong emotion. Both Martha and Mary complain bitterly to Jesus that if only he had been present, then their brother Lazarus would not have died. There is regret and recrimination, mixed with grief. Jesus too is deeply moved and weeps at the loss of his friend. Illness that leads to death tears apart loving relationships and leaves us feeling very raw and vulnerable – as Covid has done to countless families across the world these last two years.



The mourners take Jesus to the tomb where the body of Lazarus has been laid. Jesus orders that the stone sealing the tomb be removed and he then speaks to the dead man and calls him to come out. And behold, Lazarus emerges, alive, and clothed in burial garments. New life has emerged out of death! It is a foreshadowing of Jesus' resurrection. Although we tend to regard death as the end, the

incident with Lazarus and indeed the resurrection of Jesus point to another possibility – that God can bring new life even in the midst of death and grief.

This possibility is affirmed in the reading from Revelation where new life comes in the form of a whole new city, the new Jerusalem, that comes down from heaven. God will dwell amongst the people in this new city and everything will be made new. There will be no more death or crying or pain. This is the promise and hope of heaven, where people will live in God’s presence forever. One detail in this vision that is worth noting is that heaven is not imagined to exist in some alternative universe but actually comes down to transform the earth. Both these readings suggest that death is not the end – either for ourselves or for those we love who have died. Rather it is a doorway to a new form of life.

Although it is of a different scale, living through the Covid pandemic of the last two years has at times felt like a thousand little deaths. We have seen loved ones die and not been able to go to their funeral to say our goodbyes or to comfort the family. New children have been born and we may not have had the opportunity to meet them in person or to hold them. Many people have lost jobs. Others have worked and worked – beyond exhaustion – especially doctors and nurses and healthcare workers. Some have put their lives in the path of infection to serve us and to make our life relatively comfortable – people who prepare, distribute and deliver our food and all the other goods that we have learned to purchase online, those who have developed technology to keep us safe (think vaccines) and connected (think Zoom). Communities have been made stronger. New friendships have emerged via Zoom. We have become more resilient even in the face of loss and hardship. We have many reasons to be thankful despite the strain this has all placed on our fragile mental health.



The 1st of November is the traditional day on which we remember all the Christians – all the saints – who have walked before us. So today, I invite you to remember those who have gone before us – to give thanks for their faithfulness and the ways they showed us how to live. And to be reminded that they live on in God’s presence.

As Melbourne slowly opens up and as we begin to enjoy more freedoms and as life returns towards something approaching ‘normal’, let us also give thanks for the many people who have helped us get through these long and challenging months – all the essential workers that we often overlook – as well as those at the frontline of medical care and innovation.

If you would like, light a candle and offer your prayer of thanks to God.

