

Little Deaths

John 11:1-45

When I was three I had a blanket. Not just any blanket . . . it was *my* blanket! Me and my blanket were inseparable . . . we were the best of mates . . . I couldn't imagine life without 'blankie'.

Then, one day, I glanced away for a second and, when I looked back, blankie was gone! Gone! How was that possible? Blankie couldn't be gone! I needed blankie! Without blankie I would die! At three I don't think I knew what dying was, but I knew what it *felt* like . . . it felt like life without blankie! I was inconsolable. Mum tried to make it better by telling me blankie was just in the wash, but she didn't understand . . . I couldn't live without blankie!

At age three, I learnt an important lesson about life . . . life is full of little deaths.

You know those little deaths . . . the moment you realise your parents aren't perfect . . . breaking up with your first boyfriend, or girlfriend . . . losing a job . . . moving house . . . sending your first child to school . . . going through a divorce . . . surrendering your licence because your eyesight is failing . . . having major surgery . . . grieving the actual death of a child . . . or partner . . . or parent . . . those little deaths . . . where afterwards life is not the same . . . things have changed forever . . . and it feels like something in *you* has died.

Little deaths . . . they remind us that in life, we are surrounded by death . . . death which threatens to suck the life out of us . . . death which eventually *does* suck the life out of us.

As it did to Lazarus . . . and Mary and Martha . . . their beloved brother had died . . . the one Jesus loved! The one *Jesus* loved! Sometimes I think Christians give the impression that 'Jesus' is the magic word. Just say the word and everything will be okay! That seems to be what Martha is thinking: "If Jesus loved Lazarus so much why had this happened?" If Jesus had been there Lazarus wouldn't have died!

So, what good is Jesus if he can't fix things? What good is Jesus if he's can't stop bad things from happening? What good is Jesus if he can't keep us from dying?

They're good questions. They were Martha's questions.

They are questions that don't have simple, easy answers. But, perhaps you've discovered that the important things in life rarely have easy answers. Life is not black and white . . . life is complex. Those 'little deaths' we experience are actually part of life . . . even a necessary part of life. Through them we change . . . that is an inevitable part of life in this world. That change might make us stronger, but it might not . . . that change might enable us to grow . . . but it might not . . . but through it all God is there with us. Whatever questions we have about this story that much we can take away . . . God is there, in the person of Jesus. And not in a distant, detached kind of way. He's there in a real, authentic way. So, when Lazarus died, Jesus wept! Jesus wept for his friend. It hurt . . . he experienced a little death himself. This was part of life for Jesus too!

It's still part of life for Jesus as he shares life with us. Our little deaths he experiences . . . our physical death he ultimately dies with us . . . one with us to the end. But, notice, that's not all Jesus does. In this story he raises Lazarus to life. And, that's who Jesus is. He gives life. Jesus doesn't stop death, but Jesus gives life, even in the midst of death. And, isn't that always where we are? In the midst of death?

The raising of Jesus' friend is a sign. A sign of hope. Lazarus . . . dead . . . stinking in the grave . . . yet raised to life . . . by Jesus . . . a sign . . . for Mary . . . for Martha . . . for us. Whenever we experience those little deaths . . . whenever life changes us . . . whatever else is going on there, Jesus promises more life . . . because there *is* more life.

The cancer diagnosis might be part of life, but it's not *all* of life . . . it's not the end of life . . . there is more. The relationship breakdown might be part of life, but it's not *all* of life . . . it's not the end of life . . . there is more.

The depression might be part of life, but it's not *all* of life . . . it's not the end of life, there is more.

The unemployment might be part of life, but it's not *all* of life . . . it's not the end of life, there is more.

The loneliness might be part of life, but it's not *all* of life . . . it's not the end of life, there is more.

There's more life . . . now . . . there's more life in the midst of our little deaths. That's Jesus' promise. The raising of Lazarus is the sign of Jesus' commitment to that promise. Life in the midst of death.

And, when it comes to our *actual* death . . . that too might be a part of life, it might even be the end of life . . . but, it's not the end of Jesus' promise . . . there is more . . . more life . . . life even beyond death. In just a few weeks time we will celebrate Easter. We will celebrate Jesus himself being raised from death to life. The raising of Jesus is the sign of God's commitment to his promise of life: life even beyond death.

As soon as my blankie came out of the washing machine I snatched it from my mother's hands . . . still damp . . . it didn't matter . . . I had blankie back! As a three year old, I didn't know much about life, but I knew what it felt like . . . it felt like me and blankie, together! That was life. It felt like a little piece of heaven.

Amen.

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