
³⁸ Deeply moved again, Jesus went to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone covering the entrance. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take the stone away." Martha, the dead man's sister, told Jesus, "Lord, there must already be a stench. He's been dead for four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that if you believe, you would see God's glory?" John 11:38-40

A while back, there was a YouTube video of a family getting ready to embark on a long road trip for a family getaway. The parents had gotten tickets to that magical kingdom on earth, you know, the one that is run by a very wealthy mouse. To keep the adventure a surprise for their son, the parents came up with a plan to tell their son that they were going on a family vacation to a Broccoli farm. They travelled for days, but all along the way, they would bring up the thrills and excitement of what a broccoli farm would bring. The son soon became more and more excited about their destination. Upon arriving at their destination, the view was that of a grand castle and roller coasters galore, they opened the car door, and expected to see excited joy from their son. But at that point the child burst into tears — heartbroken to find that his high expectations of exploring the great broccoli farm were shattered. The video ends there.

Each of us have our own expectations in life, in relationships, in work, in family, in plans we make and of God. We can have expectations at many levels. One person once described it in this way that we can have three types of expectations versus reality. There are 'Unknown Expectations'. For example, if your mum always made you breakfast in the morning before you went to school, then you may expect that from a future spouse in the mornings. The Reality is that a future spouse may not even like to cook or would rather sleep in. Another example is if you were abandoned, rejected, or teased by others a lot as a kid, but found comfort in a best friend, girlfriend, boyfriend, or toy, you may expect someone else or material things (e.g. clothes, cars, houses, electronics, etc.) to make you feel better about yourself.

There are also 'Known Expectations'. There are numerous things that we know we need to do or have in order to feel good about our lives and relationships. For example, singles may have a "List" of traits and qualities that they know will bring more happiness to a future marriage. Our bosses may have a number of goals or tasks that we know we need to complete each day.

And then there are 'Growing Expectations'. This is where we start off wanting something, finally getting that something, then realizing that that something isn't enough anymore. For example, we all have our dream car in mind, but what if we got it tomorrow with no strings attached? Well, it would be amazing at first, but as time went on, newer and better models would come out, more scratches, dents, and dings would start to "magically" appear on it, and the costs to the maintain the vehicle would eventually become undesirable, and we'd start to realise that the

"dream car" we always wanted was starting to be more trouble than we were willing to put up with. Whether it's a house, car, educational pursuit, or relationship, we all have a tendency to look for the next best thing (in good times and in bad).

Many of us have expectations of how things should turn out in our everyday lives, however in reality, things may end up different than what we were expecting. Expectations are tricky things. On the one hand, it is healthy to expect certain things – to be treated with respect, to have laws obeyed, etc. But on the other hand, our expectations are so deep and thorough that we do not know their full extent ourselves. We are people of patterns. We expect things to follow certain 'formulas' that have been given to us over the years (either as those 'unknown', 'known', or 'growing' expectations). And when something happens that isn't 'according to plan', this can be baffling for us. Have you ever been let down by another person, been disappointed by another person, or even failed yourself by making some type of mistake? Have you had certain 'expectations' on 'life', only to discover your 'expectations' for 'your life' have not been met? You're not alone.

As we gather to commemorate 'All Saints Day', and as we recall those who have been called from this life in this past year, we have an opportunity to reflect on our 'expectations' from a truly eternal perspective. We are called to look at things from a 'heavenly point of view'. And this is not to 'escape' from 'this life', but to deal with the real 'realities' of this life.

We know that the 'reality' of 'this life' is that 'we are born, we live, and we die'. But so often we live with only the first two in mind: 'we are born and we live'. And when death confronts us, we sometime struggle as our 'realities' are changed'. Of course, as Christians, we live with a sense: 'we are born, we live, we die, we "go to heaven".' But even though we know this is true through our faith in Christ Jesus (that there is a this 'reality' of 'eternal life' through Christ), this doesn't mean we don't have times of worry and doubt. Have you ever felt a 'hole in your heart' when someone you know and love dies? We know that at one level that 'hole in the heart' is a 'good thing, insofar that it shows us that we love someone who is now gone from this life. It is OK to miss people. It's OK to say that we miss people. It's OK to say that when we began our journey of life we had certain 'known unknown expectations' (that is, we sort of assume someone will be with us for as long as we could hope for). And it's OK to express those times when we feel that our expectations (dreams for life) have been shattered. On the day of His resurrection, as Jesus walked the road to Emmaus, those disciples said, "We had hoped...?" They were honest. They just didn't realise at the time that The Answer to their questions was walking the road with them.

As we come to the Holy Gospel this day (the account of the raising of Lazarus from death), we hear of so many people with wrong expectations.

We know the backstory. Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. He was about a day's journey from Jerusalem when He received news that Lazarus had become sick (John 11:6 says Jesus remained 2 days before travelling, and when He reached Martha, Martha said Lazarus had been dead 4 days). One could imagine

that people would have 'expected' that when Jesus had heard the news of sick Lazarus, He would travel immediately. But He did not. And then when Jesus speaks, He says (John 11:11): "'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him.'" The disciples at that point said, "But Lord, if he is only asleep, he will be all right." Of course, Jesus meant that Lazarus was dead. So then Jesus said plainly, "Lazarus is dead." He then said, "And I am glad for your sakes I was not there so that you may believe."

Upon arrival, Jesus was met by Martha who said (John 11:21), "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." We can hear an 'expectation here: that Jesus would have come when He received the message, or had done something to prevent this death of someone Jesus loved. Then, when Jesus speaks about being "The resurrection and the life", Martha responds in a general way of belief. Soon after Mary arrives. When she sees Jesus, she also says (John 11:32): "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." At this point, Jesus wept. And then some around Jesus said (John 11:37), "If Jesus opened the eyes of the blind man, why couldn't He keep Lazarus from dying?" You can realistically imagine here that they didn't expect much of Jesus. And then we come to the tomb.

When the crowd had gathered at Lazarus' tomb, and Jesus says, "Take the stone away." At this point Martha says to Jesus, "Lord, there must already be a stench. He's been dead for four days." She was expecting something. But then Jesus says, "Didn't I tell you that if you believe, you would see God's glory?" And then something incredible happens. Jesus looks up into heaven and prays, and then He uses the power of His word and says, "Lazarus, come out!" And then, as the Bible says, "The dead came out, his hands and feet wrapped with pieces of cloth, and a cloth around his face. And Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him and let him go'."

Many of us are very familiar with the account of Jesus bringing Lazarus back from the dead. We have certain 'expectations' as we recall this event in Jesus' life (especially when we hear it at a funeral). This story is really about the hope of resurrection. But try to imagine this: Imagine what it would be like to be Lazarus, to be completely dead, and then to come alive again! Imagine waking up in that cave, wrapped tightly in cloth, unable to pull the covering off your own face, because your hands are still bound. It's dark, and it stinks in there. What you smell is your own flesh, that somehow isn't rotting anymore. But the stench is still hanging in the cave around you. And you hear a familiar voice, muffled, but easy to recognise. Your dearest friend is calling to you to come out. You don't even know which direction the door is, or how to get to it. But you wriggle around enough to get up, and you inch your way toward the light. Then the bandages come off, and you see Jesus standing there, welcoming you back to life. What would it be like to be risen from the dead?

Sometime we are like that raised Lazarus. We have been given new life. But we aren't exactly sure what this life really is. One Christian writer has said this, "God's promise of resurrection isn't an invitation to deny death – the death rate in my community is the same as yours: one per person and 100%." Death stinks.

There's no getting around it. But here you are. As you stumble forward, that voice you love says, "Unbind him. Unbind her. Let them go."

Our resurrection hope is not just tied to the future. We aren't just looking forward to the end of time, when all things are made new. Baptism and the story of Lazarus are here to remind us that we experience resurrection now. We participate in God's miraculous saving work now. We can live amid fear with courage, because death doesn't get the last word, for Lazarus or for us. Whatever stinks in your life, Jesus is calling to you, "Come out of there!"

Jesus said to Martha, "Didn't I tell you that if you believe, you would see God's glory?" Jesus' powerful announcement to Martha suggests that we need to embrace Jesus as the resurrection and the life not only at times of death, but also in the daily moments of our lives, because these moments, too, whether one names them so or not, are always lived in the light of Jesus - who has Himself given Himself over to death, and be raised to newness of life.

Each of us have our own expectations in life, in relationships, in work, in family, in plans we make and of God. If you've lived more than a day, you have found out that those things rarely live up to our expectations. What are those areas of your life you are holding on to expectations that might not live up to reality? And in what areas of your life are your expectations not those of a heavenly reality? But the beautiful thing about this wild life is that God works within our mess. Jesus cared more about comforting people in their reality than He did about following the neat little social norms of society. He touched the leper (Matthew 8:3), He forgave the adulterous woman (John 8:1-11), He healed on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6)... He took on our humanity (Philippians 2:7). He didn't just enter into the mess we made and tried to clean it up with us, He literally took it all upon Himself (Matthew 11:28-30).

God actually exceeds our expectations in Christ Jesus! God is at work in all of our circumstances, even the painful ones, and He wants more for us than we could ever want or imagine for ourselves. Think about this: God's glory is often revealed in hidden and unexpected places. No matter what you are facing, Jesus walks with you in even the smelliest of circumstances. And, He shows us again and again that He has overcome. His life, death and resurrection bring us new life.

Lazarus' resurrection points us to the hope of resurrection and new life that we have in Christ. What Jesus did for Lazarus is also a promise for all who believe: in Jesus there is no enemy of God—not even death itself—that can defeat us. If we are in Christ, we will have eternal life and victory over death, no matter what we face today. When we have times in which we are struggling, anxious, or afraid, we can look to Jesus and remember his promises of life forever with him. Nothing is too big, and no problem is too difficult for Jesus to overcome. Not even death itself. Amen.

Loving heavenly Father, when things are difficult and I feel discouraged, give me hope. Help me trust in Your power to bring me into life forever with You; in Jesus' name. Amen.