

Year A Lent 5 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2026

Ezekiel 37: 1-14. Romans 8: 6-11. John 11: 1-45

If your mind wandered a bit during that very long Gospel, don't feel too bad, but have another look at it later: it's a great story. Taking inspiration from that 'shortest verse' in the scriptures: "Jesus wept", I may not be that brief, but...

Jesus *wept*. He didn't just 'cry' like most of us might – he *burst* into tears, he *wept*.

Some of us may not have *allowed* ourselves to cry, let alone 'weep': - for fear of upsetting others? Touching *their* emotions? Just being 'protective'?

Some of us may never have been allowed to cry: hide your emotions, 'man up'!

Some of us may simply not have been *able* to cry, even if we wanted to. Or is that just something in the movies? But it does seem eminently possible to get out of touch with our emotions.

Yet the most horrendous things continue to happen around us and our emotions can be seen as a gift to know that we *are* sentient creatures, we *do* have feelings, and those feelings are a very central and important part of our lives: they keep us in touch with the reality of our relationships with one another.

Jesus *wept*...

And in grief, those relationships – and emotions – become particularly important. We may be held together by memories of happier times, but emotion, when we are feeling hurt by loss, is not to be ignored.

When Jesus burst into tears, those around him, we are told, said to one another, "See how he loved him" – Lazarus, his dear friend (even 'cousin'?).

Grief is everywhere in the Middle East at the minute. Many of us will have seen how passionate Semitic peoples can be. They *feel*. I get sick of how often the media use the term 'antisemitic' as if it referred only to Jewish people.

It is equally applied of course to Arabic peoples, including the Palestinians. One may well wonder if one Semitic people can fear or revile another Semitic people without being called 'anti-Semitic' themselves.

Language can become almost non-sensical. But emotions are very real indeed.

Passions, of course, can get out of hand. Peter Miller, in his regular 'Candle in the Window' mailing, quotes Jonathan Friedland's scathing critique of Trump in the Guardian last weekend:

"To confront the Iranian regime", says Friedland, "was to walk, with a lit match, towards a tinderbox soaked in gasoline. But Trump has blundered in, crushing and trampling all before him, making a bad situation worse."

When we hear in the Gospel stories of other occasions for weeping, we may think of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, because the people were so blind to the reality of what faced them.

We may think of him saying to those women who wept for him on his way to the cross, "Do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children" – telling them to wake up to the reality of what faced *them* in this world, the painful realities of their own lives and futures.

We *may* think of Jesus asking Mary Magdalen, in the garden at his resurrection, "why are you weeping?" – open your eyes to the reality right here in front of you – he himself, standing there, risen!

In every case, Jesus asks people to wake up to the reality of what is around them, what they face in their lives. If that is indeed tragic, as in this moment arriving at Lazarus' grave, then weep indeed.

But there is a twist in *this* story. Rather than come straight to Bethany when he was summoned to come to a *dying* Lazarus, he lingered, for a couple of days, and his disciples could not understand why he did that.

Not many of us would tell a story in such a way that we ourselves were shown up as being ignorant or simply wrong. But John gives us this story in its raw state: the disciples *did* get him wrong!

Jesus knew what was to be accomplished here – revealing the glory of God in this dead man being brought back to life, heralding his own resurrection.

Religion and ritual tend not to cope with new life. We like to hang on to the old wine in old wineskins, being, in matters of religion, at our most conservative.

But like that Christian Aid slogan – 'we believe in life *before* death' – Jesus comes to offer new life both in life *and* in death. And the emotion behind that is, perhaps even for his very-human self, completely off the scale.

He *wept*.

When people of faith lock themselves behind the doors, the structures, of the old ways, Jesus is moved *beyond* the tears of normal crying, to abject weeping, as is the very heart of God.

We pray for faith, and we pray for our eyes to be opened to the reality *both* of what is happening around us in this world *and* of the power of God's love to transform our hearts and the hearts of others, that we may know life together in its fulness.

In this brief season of feeling, feeling Christ's suffering, we wait and watch – and maybe weep – in *faith*.