

02/04/17 – Passion Sunday – Year A    John 11

A text (though not from scripture):

We do **not** have a God who averts disaster;  
We **do** have a God who shares in it

People sometimes feel very mixed up when our faith tells us one thing but our feelings go the other way. So it is consoling to see today how Jesus, like us, experiences the conflict between the pain that prevails in the heart even as the head makes clear statements of faith. In today's story St. John paints OLJC as having a remarkable amount of human emotion – whilst at the same time making very clear his divinity. In a sister church today's E P expresses the duality of our Lord's person:

As a man like us, Jesus wept for Lazarus his friend.  
As the eternal God, he raised Lazarus from the dead.

Several times in the story our attention is drawn to the love that OLJC felt towards his friend Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary. For human love exposes the heart to pain and sorrow. The heart which loves is tender and sensitive, and it bleeds when faced with the suffering of a loved one. So, when Jesus sees the tears of Mary and the other mourners his heart is deeply distressed – St John says, Jesus, greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. And then, 2 verses later, Jesus wept – the shortest verse in the bible, two words in the KJV, 3 in Greek, 4 in our reading.

But what is so remarkable about this human frailty of OLJC is how it stands alongside the clear statements of divine faith. At the start of the story Jesus announces that the sickness would end, not in death but in God's glory. At the centre of the story comes the great divine claim of Jesus, I am the resurrection and the life.

And towards the end of the story OLJC thanks the Father for hearing his prayer: I knew indeed that you always hear me. The point is repeatedly made that the believing head cohabits with the distressed heart.

And this experience of conflicting emotions is one that we can recognise in our own lives. For instance: at a time of bereavement our mind, our head, can be accepting the consoling teachings of Xtian faith whilst at the same time the heart's distress moves us to tears.

Or we can be faced with worry and anxiety about the troubles – perhaps the wayward behaviour - of someone we love. We pray and pray, but see no improvement. We must learn to appreciate how deep trust in God co-exists with our anxiety and the sleepless nights of worry.

Or again, we are taking up some challenge for Xst's sake. We are confident that God is calling us here and now, and will be with us in the venture – but our knees knock and our hearts flutter with nervousness at the same moment.

In these experiences of conflict between that our divine faith that we believe that God knows what God is doing and the human frailty of our human feelings – can this really be what God wants me to do? – we are not alone. Our consolation comes in knowing that Jesus too experienced how the believing head co-exists with the distressed heart.