

If only

Notes on the Bible readings

- Jesus was teaching when he had news of his friend Lazarus' illness. Instead of rushing to be by his side, Jesus stayed where he was for two more days before making the journey to Bethany. When he arrived, Lazarus was already dead.

- Jesus' humanity is shown in this story. He is anxious about whether he should travel to Bethany. He is worried about his own and his disciples' safety. He is deeply moved by the sisters' disappointment, anger and grief. And he is touched by the presence of those from the village who console them.

- As well as losing their brother, Lazarus' death would have added significance for Martha and Mary. He was the source of income and status for the family. They were losing their reputation and status in society as well as their closest relative. They were losing their hope.

- This passage can be read as a parable by those who want to know where Jesus is when life falls apart. It suggests that he is present even in his absence. We can imagine him carrying his concern for the Bethany family from the moment he hears about his dear friend's illness. Jesus' faith carries him through the dangers of the journey to Bethany and into the place of loss and death, where he brings life even from the tomb through the resurrection power of his word. How often do we struggle to see Jesus' presence when things go wrong?

For reflection and comment linking this week's Bible reading to the news, current issues and events, go to www.rootsontheweb.com and click on PostScript.



Questions for reflection

- ▶ Who/what do you call upon when things go wrong?
- ▶ When things go wrong, how is Jesus present for you?
- ▶ ...and when things are going well?



A prayer of thanks and praise

*Thank you, Lord, for your constant presence.
Thank you for holding us and comforting us.
Thank you for crying with us when we are hurting.
Thank you for weeping with us when we are broken-hearted.
Thank you, Lord, that you never let us down,
that you always give us hope.
Amen.*

A prayer for others

We pray for all who weep today: for those who grieve and mourn for the loss of loved ones – husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, brothers, sisters, friends...

*We pray for those who care for people at the end of their earthly lives: chaplains, hospice workers, nurses, doctors, carers, pastors, undertakers...
Give them strength, courage, empathy and love as they walk with those who weep.*

We pray for situations where there seems to be no hope; for families destroyed by death, poverty, war, violence, or abuse; for those who feel let down by society; and for those who feel let down by you – may all know your presence in those dark times.

*As they wait on you, comfort them, Lord, we pray.
Amen.*

A personal prayer

*God of hope,
heal me and restore me,
that I might know your resurrection power in my life.
Amen.*

Live your faith

Visit or call a friend or neighbour who has been bereaved, or is lonely.