

All Saints Day 2009

There is a shroud over all people, there is a sheet spread over all nations. This shroud that Isaiah is talking about is death for all. The shroud and the sheet are burial clothes. This is the undeniable fate for all people. All of mankind is silenced by death.

Just this week, my little brother got home safely from Iraq. But three out of eight young men in his group are never going to come home. They were killed. In his unit, my brother was the primary driver of one of the transport vehicles, and that particular vehicle, his truck, was blown up. An alternate driver was driving at the time and he was killed. The first thing that came to my mind was that it could have been my brother. Now I have my brother back again, but what about the parents who will never see their sons, the wives who will never see their husbands and the children who will never see their fathers?

Death goes on all around us. Grand parents die from old age. Fire fighters die while working. Kids we knew in high school die in car accidents. Friends crash on motorcycles. Several of my own classmates have died of cancer. But whether it's crib death, early and sudden, or the slow and progressive attack of Alzheimer's, we can't avoid death. It is coming, and it is final.

We know that we are going to die. That's obvious. But, as horrible as death is, there is something worse: spiritual death. We have offended God and separated ourselves from each other. And for this we have earned a whole eternity for crying and mourning and anger and disgrace. Death is coming and there is nothing that we can do about it.

In our gospel reading we see the sadness and gloom that death brings. Jesus entered into a hopeless situation. Lazarus hadn't merely flat lined in need of a jump start from a couple of medics. No hope of revival. Lazarus was long dead. And at this point he was starting to decompose. When Jesus spoke about removing the stone Martha reacted by saying, "um, the body is starting to rot and the smell will be overpowering," and her sister Mary was thinking, "if only Jesus had gotten here sooner he could have done something." The other mourners respond to Jesus' arrival by saying, "Jesus gave sight to the blind; couldn't he have kept this man from dying? But now it is too late." The reaction of the crowd is not doubt, but certain hopelessness.

But for Jesus there was never a moment of uncertainty. Jesus knows who he is, and he reminded them of his promises. "Didn't I tell you that if you believed that you would see the glory of God?" Then, to make his identity clear to everyone, he called Lazarus with a single command, "come out," and the dead man came out.

Death seems so final. It is hard to believe that we are going to return from the grave. But Jesus went through it ahead of us. He proved that he has power over death by bringing himself back from the dead. And he gives us his word. His promise is perfectly clear. We are in his hands. And there is no safer place.

When Jesus rose, he folded up his burial clothes in the tomb. He set aside his shroud and the sheet emerged from the cave of death. There is a shroud over all peoples. All nations are bound by burial clothes but our king says don't worry I will destroy them. Jesus has torn apart the burial clothes that have bound the world and covered every nation in fear.

Lazarus emerged shuffling his feet barely able to move. Paralyzed by the bonds of his death garment Lazarus scooted out of the cave. Jesus gave the command to set Lazarus free from his

burial clothes. This is a glimpse of the unbinding foretold in Isaiah. And in this story it is applied to an individual. God has removed the threat of death from the whole world and he has done this for you too. The one who is king of all things has released you. He has swallowed up death and done away with sin. You are free to live without fear. Jesus does away with burial clothes and gets you ready with party clothes. Far from death and sadness, he has prepared a feast with the finest wines and the richest food. We have to celebrate. Our king has defeated death. Jesus invites you to feast on his body and blood as he feeds you from now into eternity.

In the mean time before Jesus takes us to paradise, there is still sadness on earth.

That's why Jesus weeps for Lazarus. Death is tragic. He mourns with his friends and comforts them. He is with you in your sadness but the important thing is that he is with you. In life and in death. God's desire has always been to rescue you. Everything is going to plan. All of the promises that Isaiah recorded for us are echoed in John's revelation. God repeats himself. We have no reason to be scared. Jesus says "see I am making all things new." everything the whole world, and yes even your own body will be made new. And speaking of your salvation with classic repetition he finishes by saying, "it is done."

Jesus is in control. And he reminds us of this fact. Death is not a problem for him. Jesus loves you and he is your savior. He is not about to leave you in the grave.

When the people at the funeral witnessed Lazarus rising from the dead, they believed in Jesus. It is as if they recognized their king. At that moment they could say, "this is our God, we have waited for him that he might save us. This is the Lord. Let us rejoice in his salvation."