

Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now . . .

When we read the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke we travel through a world of towns, crowds, a grand lake, fishing boats, laborers, hills, sunny days, parables about sowing seed, about buried treasure, pearls, a kind of everydayness – a landscape that's familiar.

When we turn to the Gospel of John, things go kind of mystical, philosophical, Palestine disappears, the very human Jesus of the first three Gospels becomes "the Word" that spoke the world into being, now made flesh – and the movement of the characters takes on a formality befitting a few select episodes in which Jesus as a creative Word becomes a series of metaphors dispelling darkness – he becomes a wellspring, light, vitality itself. It's poetic through and through – hardly journalism.

Today's reading about the raising of Lazarus from his tomb highlights this style. Jesus while away somewhere hears about Lazarus's serious illness and delays two days before arriving at Bethany, the home of Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus. Consequently Lazarus dies and is entombed before Jesus gets there. The sisters, convinced of the power of Jesus's Word to revitalize the world, wish he had come sooner: *Lord, if you had been here . . .* Still, they believe their brother will rise again at the end of time.

It's as though poor Lazarus had missed the bus, too late to be saved by a prompt Jesus, too early to have arrived at the end of time – so he was placed in a tomb as in a filing cabinet for future reference.

But what the sisters (and we) forget are all those moments in John's Gospel where, when for example, Jesus hears the words *They have no wine*, he says, *Fill the jars with water* (which becomes wine!). And when the Samaritan woman says, *I know that the Messiah is coming . . .* Jesus replies, *I am he, the one speaking with you*. And when the Pharisees were offended by his cure of a lame man on the Sabbath, Jesus replied, *The hour is coming and is **now** here when those who hear my word will live*. And when the Pharisees spoke proudly of their ancestor Abraham, Jesus replied, *Before Abraham came to be, I AM* (present tense!). And when the man born blind and now sighted wondered who the Son of Man was, Jesus said, *You have seen him; he is speaking to you as God's creative, healing, potent Word – right now*.

In a way aren't we like Lazarus, all wrapped up in a tomb as in a waiting room, TOO LATE to have walked the earth *when Jesus did* and been brought to fullness of life by his actual touch – and – TOO EARLY to experience a resurrection that awaits us at the end of time? And yet the **NOWNESS** of Christ in John's Gospel is still available to us – ever present and capable of moving us, transforming us as the Word made flesh, made sound, illuminating – so much more than dead letters upon a page – but power! Can't you hear him? Even now? Despite that stone that weighs upon your hearts? *Lazarus, Jane, Thomas, Ramon, Nancy, Isabella, Martha, Geoff . . . come forth!*

Cycle A option.

Geoff Wood