

Imagine that you were writing a story about a superhero who had come to earth, disguised as a human being. In the story this superhero arrives at the funeral of a friend, knowing that he has the power to raise his dead friend to life and that he is about to wipe away all the pain surrounding this situation in a few minutes' time. How do you think this superhero would act? Wouldn't you as a writer show him smiling, excited, even playful. You'd show him rubbing his hands together in anticipation, saying to the people around him, "Wait until you see what I'm about to do!" Or maybe you as the story writer would have him speak in a heroic, powerful tone: "I am the resurrection and the life." Both of those reactions would seem to be in character for someone who claims to be divine. But we would never imagine that such a divine person would get sucked into agony and just stand there weeping. Why would the hero do that, if he knows the outcome already?

Well, if you were paying attention during the Gospel reading, you know this is not a made-up scenario. John's account shows us in a dramatic way what the New Testament says elsewhere: that Jesus is both truly God and fully man; not just God disguised as a man; not just a man with an air of holiness; but the man who is God, or to use John's own phrase, the Word made flesh. And the Word of God made flesh is standing outside of Lazarus' tomb, in tears.

Now, virtually every English translation of John 11 verse 38 says something like this: "Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb." This is a valid translation, but it softens the original Greek by many degrees. John uses a word for the phrase 'deeply moved' that is just fun to say, so I'm going to say it. Embrimomenos. Embrimomenos. And if that sounds convoluted and complicated, that's good, because the word describes a state of emotional agitation that can mean anything from groaning to bellowing with anger. Somehow, no translator feels they have the freedom to say what every Greek expert says the word means. Jesus is furious! He's crying out with rage. What's he so angry about?

Jesus is raging against death. He doesn't approach the tomb with the family of the deceased saying, "Look, just get used to it. Everybody dies. That's the way of the world. Try to accept it." He doesn't do that at all. Jesus is looking squarely at our greatest nightmare—the loss of life, the loss of loved ones—and he's incensed. He's mad at evil and suffering. What does that mean?

A couple things. First, it reveals how God feels about death. I invite you to think through the implications of this. Think through Jesus' emotional state here. Think of all the forms death takes in this world. Lazarus had died because of an illness. But death also comes through warfare; death is visited upon the defenseless; death is offered as a way to settle a score or the solution to an inconvenient problem. Jesus, the Son of God, sees all of this and groans. It tears him apart. And if that's how Jesus feels about death, then that has to shape the thoughts and ideas of those who have been saved by him and who are following him.

But a person might ask, if God is that unhappy with the world as it is, why doesn't he just show up and stop it? Why doesn't he just appear on earth and end all evil? But that question reveals a lack of self-awareness. The Bible says—and we know deep down—that so much that is wrong with the world is wrong because of the human heart. So much of the misery of life here is due to selfishness, pride, cruelty, anger, oppression, war, and violence...which means that if Jesus Christ had come to earth with the sword of God's wrath against evil, none of us would have been left to tell about it. As much as we don't like to admit it, eliminating all evil would mean eliminating us.

However, Jesus did not come with sword in hand. He came with nails in his hands. He did not come to bring judgment; he came to bear judgment. The sad irony here is that the restoration of Lazarus' life leads directly to Jesus' death. When the religious leaders see what Jesus has done in this display of power, they realized this miracle made him more dangerous than they ever thought he would be. So after he raises Lazarus, the leaders have a meeting, and by verse 53 of chapter 11, John says, "from that day on, they plotted to take his life."

Jesus knew all this, of course. He knew that if he raised Lazarus from the dead, the religious establishment would try to do away with him. And yet he knew the only way to bring Lazarus out of the grave was to put himself in the grave. He knew the only way to interrupt Lazarus's funeral was to summon his own. If he was going to save us from death, he was going to have to go to the cross, and bear the judgment we deserve. And that's why, when Jesus approached the tomb, instead of smiling at the prospect of putting on a great show, instead of "Wait 'til they get a load of me," he was shaking with anger and groaning and had tears streaming down his face. He knew what it would cost him to save us from death. Maybe he was feeling the jaws of death starting to close in on him. And yet knowing and experiencing all that he cried, "Lazarus, come out."

Seeing Jesus' embrimomenos, those who witnessed this event said about Jesus, "See how he loved Lazarus." But what I want you to see today is how much He loved you. He became human, mortal, vulnerable, killable—all out of love for you.

Do you realize what Jesus has done for you, really done...for you? To help explain it, I'd like to introduce you to the author Dorothy Sayers. Sayers was one of the first women to go to Oxford, and she was a writer of detective fiction. She wrote a series of great stories and novels, called the Lord Peter Wimsey stories. Lord Peter was an aristocratic detective, single and alone, and in the middle of the series, a tall, not particularly attractive woman named Harriet Vane appears in the stories. Harriet is one of the first women to go to Oxford, and she is a writer of detective fiction. She and Peter fall in love, get married, and solve mysteries together. What's going on there? Some people have speculated that Dorothy Sayers looked into the world she created—and into the character she created—and saw his pain, his loneliness, fell in love with him, and wrote herself into the story to be with him—you might even say, to save him.

God, in Jesus, has done very much the same thing. God looked into our world—he world he made—and saw us destroying ourselves by turning away from him. And it filled his heart with pain and anguish. He loved us. He saw us struggling in the traps and misery we created for ourselves. And so, he wrote himself in. Jesus, the Word made flesh the man who is God, born in a manger, born to die on a cross for us, bellows and rages and anger against our greatest enemy, and is the only person who can do something about it. And he does. Look at who this Jesus is, how much he loves you, how much he feels for you, and what he was willing to do to call you out of the tomb.