

“All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well.” Julian of Norwich wrote these now-famous words while on death’s door, sick from the plague, during a time of plague, when it seemed the world was ending. When it seemed that life would never be the same for the living, which indeed it was not.

Julian knew that the life of Christ was fully alive within her even as she was sick and in danger of death. She knew that the life of Christ was fully her own eternal life whether she died of the plague or survived to die of something else later on.

All was Christ to this saint, and all was the life of Christ. Even the passage of death led to new life in Christ. Few of us have such sure faith in life, and fewer of us have such sure faith in the face of sickness and death and grief. And yet, this is the promise of Christ through whom we see and experience the glory of God.

We Christians have the gospels and the lives of the saints to guide us to the truth of Christ’s promise and the glory of God in every moment of our lives, no matter what the circumstances. Mary and Martha did not, at the point in their lives that Lazarus died.

Mary and Martha had remarkable faith in Jesus and the resurrection at the end of time. But they did not understand the fullness of Jesus even though they recognized him as the Messiah. They could not grasp God’s glory or that the Son of God truly was and is the master and author of life itself, both for the living and the dead.

And we can’t blame Mary and Martha and the disciples or any of the others. They honored the words of Jesus, and they believed the other miracles he performed, but who could believe in literal resurrection of the dead? It’s hard for us to get our heads around, and we’ve been trying to understand this mystery for more than 2000 years.

It’s hard to get something that is nearly impossible to believe into our thick skulls. Humans are stubborn that way, and Jesus knows that about us. Sometimes I think much of the ministry of Jesus during his life was just trying to get us to believe what we always thought was impossible.

Jesus asks us to truly believe his teachings about the Kingdom of God, about the life in the Kingdom, and about who Jesus truly is in his many “I am” statements. Today we see another of his “I am” statements that lead us to understanding that Jesus is truly the Son of God, and that lead us to understanding what God is really like. Here, in today’s reading, Jesus tells us, “I am... the resurrection and the life.”

And Jesus knows that, while his words are important to his hearers, it will take actions to get us to really understand. So he shows us. He shows us the glory of God. He shows us that he is, just as God is, the resurrection and the life.

In this way, we can see that it’s important that Jesus waited until Lazarus was four days in the tomb and beginning to decay. It sounds at first that Jesus is being cruel by letting Lazarus die and his loved ones grieve when he didn’t have to. But he did have to. It was the only thing that was going to get us to understand that he, like his father, is truly THE resurrection and life.

If Jesus had shown up a day or two early and brought Lazarus back to life, people might have thought that Lazarus was not really dead but in a coma or something like that. Likewise, if Jesus had waited too long, the body of Lazarus might have decayed too much, and bringing him

back to life might have frightened the mourners too much. Jesus knows what it takes for us to understand and accept his message. That he IS the resurrection and the life, here, now, and always. No matter what.

By bringing Lazarus back from the dead, filling Lazarus with all the life he once had, Jesus shows forth the glory of God. God, the resurrection and the life. Jesus, the resurrection and the life.

And we need this understanding of who and what Jesus is before we can be ready for the death and resurrection of Jesus. A different kind of resurrection compared to that of Lazarus. Physical, yes, but eternal. A resurrection that death can never touch again. A physical and eternal resurrection that is an impossible idea for us to grasp without a deep understanding that Jesus IS THE resurrection and THE life.

And once we understand this, accept this, this mystery that is so difficult for us to get through our thick skulls, then we, like Julian of Norwich and the other disciples and saints, can experience all of life and all of sickness and mortal death as THE eternal life of Christ eternally living within us. Life that death cannot destroy.

This is a mystery. One we can understand, but only because Jesus showed us as well as told us throughout the gospels and in the lives of his disciples and saints.

This is a mystery. One we can understand because we can see it in the lives of those who have been changed by accepting the life of Christ within them and us.

I ask you to ponder this mystery of life and death and resurrection as we move from Lazarus to the bittersweet path leading to the Cross over the next several days. I ask you to accept and hold fast the understanding that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Hold fast. Because it's going to be a bumpy ride. Especially this year.

But if we hold the life of Christ inside of us, we too will be able to walk our own paths of life and sickness and death with unshakable faith. We too will be able to say, without any irony or bitterness, that all shall be well. All shall be well. And all manner of thing shall be well.

Amen.

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