

*The sky is empty of all but light  
And we have returned to our dwellings  
Like the ancient Israelites  
Each to his own home  
To await the Passing Over  
Of the Angel of Death*

*I do not fear him.*

A powerful verse from Sarah de Nordwall's poem, 'Time begins again' – hot off the press. Nor does Jesus 'fear' death in this story of Lazarus, rather Jesus 'fears' God in its most essential of meanings, which is to love God for God's sake and, for Jesus, to do the Father's will. And for this to have meaning for us, Jesus has to be both fully human and fully God – somehow aware of his destiny as God and yet also unaware. So he approaches the tomb after a delay which may appear both 'inhuman' - too sure of his and Lazarus's future in God – and all too human, in his sudden grief. He stands both at a distance from us in his God-like status and, one might say, at a distance from himself, only then to come to a realisation in his great grief that he is fully human after all. I think of the professional distance a minister is required to maintain at the funeral of a friend and yet how, in its breaking down, a deeper, truer truth emerges. And this deeper truth, not only liberates Jesus, but Lazarus, too. Can we see the present passing over of the Angel of Death as an opportunity for this same re-calibration for ourselves? Life is indeed precious after all and time collapses into the need to love now 'before its too late'; to put off the cloak of Englishness, perhaps, the constrained civility, or worse, of 'normal' times and allow a deeper appreciation of who we are and who we are *for* to emerge. And this, not as a means of merely delaying or avoiding trauma but, as with Lazarus, of living through it. Trauma will come, it's our lot, but not our end. There is a deeper truth to our living which only God's Spirit can reveal, which is, indeed, God's Spirit giving us life and living in us. This life in the Spirit is symbolised by the revivifying of Lazarus. It comes as a consequence of Jesus' cry from his own depths. He, too, has in a sense, been revived by the death of Lazarus. Death's sting removed by love.

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