Part of the enigma of Gospel of John, is its distinctiveness from the other three canonical Gospels. John does not tell of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem; scarcely mentions the kingdom of God; has no parables; has no list of the twelve disciples; has nothing like the Sermon on the Mount; has no bread and wine at the last supper; and never mentions demons.

John only tells seven miracle stories, and he calls them “signs.”  They are teaching moments; they are laden with meaning that is revealed by the miracle itself.

Take the story we are looking at today.  The raising of Lazarus from the dead. This is the climax of John’s gospel, in many ways, and it is clearly the catalytic event that galvanised the path to the death of Jesus.

To put the story in context, Jesus had recently left Jerusalem because people had gone so far as to pick up rocks with which to stone him to death for the blasphemy of claiming to be God.

He went to Bethabara on the Eastern side of the Jordan, where John the Baptist had baptised people.

That is where he was when he got this message from his friends Mary and Martha that their brother was sick.  Jesus must have been very close to Lazarus, because their message simply said, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”

But John makes it clear that Jesus chooses not to go directly, but waits until two days have passed, and then he announces to the disciples, “Okay, let’s go back to Judea.”

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived in Bethany, which was only two miles from Jerusalem.  The disciples were incredulous.

“Rabbi, the Jews were just trying to stone you there, and now you are going there again?”  Jesus gives them an odd answer about the number of hours of daylight in a day, and that Lazarus had died.

Thomas, later called the Doubter, said, whether in resignation or exasperation or bravery, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”  There was no question in their minds what another trip to Jerusalem could mean, and they were understandably not keen. Thomas was no doubter here, but a disciple ready to die with Jesus.

When they arrived, Mary and Martha both expressed resentment that Jesus was not there when they needed him, that he could have kept Lazarus from

dying.  Losing a loved one brings numbing grief, anger, and despair.

I’m sure we can all empathise with Martha and Mary  and we know the feeling of asking God why he was not willing to do whatever we asked of him, as soon as we ask?

Jesus feels their sadness and understood their grief, as we are told in v35 “Jesus wept”, shortest and most poignant verse, Jesus knew the strength of human love and the depth of human sorrow.

There is a lot of speculation as to why Jesus delayed going to help Lazarus, some suggest that Lazarus died before the message got to Jesus, knowing this, Jesus waited 2 days before setting out on the 2 day journey as the Jews believed that the soul leaves the body 3 days after death, so by waiting 4 days John could have been underlining and highlighting that Lazarus was indeed dead and therefore really emphasising the majesty of what Jesus did, this is added to by Martha and Mary letting Jesus know that the body of their brother was already decomposing.

In the midst of this scene of loss, Jesus injects a ray of hope when he says to Martha, “Your brother will live again.” Jesus brings hope into a situation which to the world looked like total loss.

 Martha replies, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”  Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life.  Those who believe in me, even though they die, shall live; and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.  Do you believe this?”

Martha then proclaims her faith and says that she believes that Jesus is the Messiah, the promised of God.

And then at Jesus command the tomb was opened and Jesus called Lazarus forth from the tomb and had the people unwrap the grave cloths and let him go.  “Unbind him and let him go.”  He is no longer a prisoner of death.  He is free to live and live fully, no longer bound by fear or death.

The down side of this story, if there is one, is that Lazarus, had been raised from death, to die again at some point.

Jesus promise is NOT a promise that Christians will never experience death.

It is a promise that Jesus is the source of life and resurrection and death is no barrier to the life he offers.

In this reading we are reminded of the good news that Jesus is Lord over death and that believing in him leads to eternal life.

But I think there is more than that.  I think it reminds us that Jesus is Lord in this life as well, and that he wants to give us an abundant life in this world as well as in the next.  Unbound and free.

Meat on the plate while you wait and pie in the sky when you die.

Jesus says, “I came that they might have life, and have it more abundantly.”

One of the early church fathers named Irenaeus said, “The glory of God is a person fully alive.”

In our current situation, when the news is full of gloom and doom it’s good to know that we have a promise of abundant life, in the here and now and fullness of life to follow our deaths.

we need to know that God is with us, that in him we can have fullness of life both in this world and the next.

Amen