

Our bodies are amazing aren't they?

I trained as a medical doctor at Adelaide Uni and I remember the constant sense of amazement at the human body. For just one example, I remember studying the renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system - which is a bit of a mouthful to say! It's a system that connects kidneys and blood vessels and nerves and pressure sensors and even hormones made in your lungs to control blood pressure and urine production.

I remember swat vac with pages of butchers paper trying to draw out all the interconnected systems and feedback loops. A few years out of medical practice now and I can't remember much of the detail, but I do remember that sense of awe at the amazing complexity of our bodies.

On a different level, I was thinking how amazing our bodies are when I was just going for a bush walk the other day - Knees and legs working away, lungs sucking and heart pumping. Eyes and ears to take it all in. And a brain to coordinate it all and still have the computing power to hold a conversation and admire the beauty of it all.

Our bodies are amazing.

Yet for many of us the complexity of our bodies really comes home when they aren't working as they should. When things go wrong. When we are confronted with the fragility of our bodies.

I remember a day when I saw so clearly how fragile we are.

I was working as a rural GP staffing the medical centre at one of Victoria's ski resorts.

It was a beautiful blue sky day that I began with a spectacular cross country ski before breakfast - what a way to start the day!

But the beauty of the day gave way to the tragedy that unfolded just before lunch.

My colleague and I were called out on-scene - a rare occasion that hinted at the severity of the incident.

A young man had lost control on his skis and suffered a high speed impact at the bottom of the run. His day began with fun and joy in the midst of an amazing part of this wonderful world and ended in disaster.

How fragile we are.

How fragile we are, I thought - as we tried to stabilise his spine and maintain his airway, tried to keep up with blood loss and splint fractured limbs.

How fragile we are, I thought - as we worked with the paramedics to get him ready for evacuation for further treatment.

How fragile we are - a fragility that left a healthy young man living with brokenness and disability, and how my heart went out to that young man and his family and friends.

Most of my practice was not that dramatic, which is perhaps why I remember that day so clearly. But whether we work in the health professions or not, we all know the reality of disability, of sick bodies, of broken bodies, of things not as they should be, and we long for healing.

And God shares a profound concern for our bodies.

He longs to give us healing - body and soul, with implications for now and all eternity.

And there is perhaps no story in the Bible that captures this better than what we have just read. This wonderful story of Jesus and his friend Lazarus.

It's a story that comes in three scenes, and I think each scene helps us see Jesus more clearly and so appreciate God's great concern for our bodies.

I encourage you to keep the leaflet open with the reading before you as we consider this story together.

Scene 1 - 11:1-16 The humanity of Jesus

Scene 1 - "Now a man named Lazarus was sick" This is the news that Jesus received, and we hear it with him. Jesus is in the east of Israel about two days journey away from Lazarus who lives just out of the capital city Jerusalem in a little town called Bethany, a little town Jesus had visited a number of times previously.

John tells us that Lazarus had two sisters, and the family were known to Jesus.

So we learn a little bit about Lazarus, but we actually learn a lot about Jesus.

For one thing, we learn that Jesus loved his friends.

Mary and Martha knew that Jesus loved his friends, which is why they would send word to Jesus saying 'the one you love is sick.'

John wants us to know that Jesus loved his friends, and so he repeats it for emphasis in verse 5 'Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus'

His disciples knew he loved his friends, because Jesus called Lazarus his friend, 'our friend'.

(Pause)

Jesus loved his friends.

Now this might seem a pretty mundane, obvious kind of thing to say, but it is important to hear.

By this point in John's account of Jesus ministry, John has already recorded Jesus' power to do remarkable things - to heal a boy on his death bed with a fever, to enable a paralysed man to walk, to give sight to another born blind, and even feed a crowd of people in the midst of the wilderness. He might seem like some kind of superman, and a bit hard to relate to.

On the other hand, I don't know what kind of idea you have of Jesus, but it seems that stacks of us picture him looking like a mannequin with a halo around his head, and that can be hard to relate to as well.

But Jesus was a man who loved his friends.

You see, God is so concerned with our bodies that he came in one - with our weakness and frailty and suffering and pain. And he got right down into the thick of it all - not standing aloof, not merely observant and remote - he loved his friends, he shared life, he cared for people.

And right away we see God's wonderful affirmation of our concern for the wellbeing of others. If you work in a health profession, or in any way contribute to the wellbeing of others, you are sharing the concerns of Jesus. And there can be no higher affirmation of your vocation and your concern.

He showed his compassion and concern for the suffering of others over and over again.

Jesus loved his friends.

So we'd expect him to care for his friend Lazarus, right!

Which is what makes this first scene just a little bit surprising.

Because when Jesus heard that his friend Lazarus was sick, he didn't make any effort to help.

John tells us that Jesus deliberately delayed and waited around - he stayed right where he was, and only got on the road when he knew that Lazarus was already dead!

So we get to the end of scene one having learnt a few important things about Jesus, but with a nagging question:

Why didn't he go sooner - does he really love him?

Scene 1 - 11:1-16 The humanity of Jesus

Verse 17 is where scene 2 opens as Jesus comes to Bethany

"On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days."

The sisters of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, illustrate for us two common responses of grief - the activism who comes out early seeking answers and help, and the paralysed aching that waits at home.

Yet in their turn each comes to Jesus with the same gut wrenching acknowledgment - so loaded with emotion it seems to be accusation, despair and question all rolled in together:

'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'

'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'

And they were right. Jesus had already demonstrated his power to heal the body, whether it was the boy on the verge of death or the lame or the blind.

Some of us might be skeptical of any claim about miracles, we might look for a scientific explanation of them, but for Mary and Martha, Jesus' track record as a healer gave them every reason to believe that if Jesus had come earlier their dear brother Lazarus would not have died.

And again we see the humanity of Jesus.

For he grieved with them.

Read with me from verse 33

“When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” He asked. “Come and see, Lord” they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

Jesus loved his friends, and he grieved with them.

He was deeply moved... well actually, it's helpful to get the emphasis right on that or we'll down play it.

Do you tend to down play when others show emotion. I wonder if your family is at all like mine. My family tends to avoid conflict, and even talking about conflict, so we tend to downplay how fired up someone was. So a statement like “He was a bit upset” really means “he was furious.” In the same way, on first reading this we might have thought Jesus was a bit just a little put out. But we need to read this with the right emphasis.

“When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was *deeply moved in spirit and troubled.*”

Jesus knew how this story would end - he told his disciples back in scene one that this would not end in death, he told them he was just coming to wake Lazarus up, as if raising a dead man was just as simple as waking him from sleep.

Jesus did not weep with the grief of those who have no hope in the face of death, but he shared their grief in compassion for their loss.

Yet his core he was furious.

He was outraged by the evidence before him of the brokenness of this world, the pain of our bodies and the grief of relationships torn apart by death.

In his great compassion, he was outraged by the presence of death - for it should not be so.

And so this scene closes with another question - the question that is on the lips of the crowd, as we read in verse 37

‘could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?’

At the end of scene 1 we asked - did he really love Lazarus?

Now at the end of scene 2 we ask - could he really save him?

Either Jesus could have helped but didn't really love him.

Or he loved him but couldn't help.

That seems to be the logic. And it is question that many of us have asked God:

“How could this be - God - if you are there, how could you let this happen to me, or my mum, or my brother, or my friend, or this world?

Most of us who have been close to those in grief have surely asked this of God at some point, or perhaps you've even dismissed the possibility of God being there at all because of the power of this question.

And it is the question that John wants us to feel as we read this story. It is the question we need to ask: God, we are hurting here, and I want to know if you really care, and if you do, can you do anything about it?

Whether we know this pain professionally or personally as we walk with those in grief and suffering, in the pit of our stomach I think we share the aching realisation of Martha and Mary -

‘If you had been here Lord, my brother... mother... friend... patient would not have died.’

Scene 3 - 11:38-44 The Power of Jesus

And so we come to the third scene of this short story, a scene so powerful in its simplicity.

Jesus comes to the tomb, he asks for it to be opened, he prays, and he calls out the dead man. And Lazarus walks out.

Jesus raised the dead man back to life.

And in doing this, Jesus shows his hand - he lays his cards on the table - he demonstrates who he is.

In medical terms, Jesus shows us that he is not just symptom relief, he is God's definitive management.

Epilogue - The promise of Jesus 11:25-26

Jesus showed his great compassion for the hungry, the blind, the lame and the grieving. And his great compassion means that he doesn't stop at symptom relief. He is God's definitive management for the disease and decay and death of this world.

You see, all the pain and suffering we know, the very experience of death itself, these are symptoms - symptoms of our broken relationship with God, who is the very source of life. And God does not merely offer a short patch up or temporary relief. God comes as one of us for the ultimate healing of our bodies through the restoration of our relationship with him. And right through this story it has been Jesus' intent that we would see him and believe that this is who he is - God's definitive management for the healing of our bodies.

With the benefit of hindsight we can see this thread running right through the story of Lazarus.

It was there in the first scene when Jesus told his disciples that he was glad he had not been with Lazarus, because then they might see his great act and believe in him.

And in the final scene he prayed to God saying that he spoke as he did so that those around him might hear and believe that he had been sent by God.

But the central purpose of Jesus is seen most clearly right at the heart of this story in the middle of scene 2, in verse 25 as Jesus reassured Martha in her despair and spoke these great words: 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.'

This is the profound claim of Jesus - that he offers resurrection life.

He's not just offering symptom relief, he is God's definitive management. Not just resuscitation, but resurrection.

Medical or not, most of us know something about people being resuscitated - we've probably all seen it on TV or in a movie, we probably have images of CPR, and tracings of blood pressure and heart rate.

We speak of saving lives, of curing disease, of preventing death. But they are all relative terms. The lives saved will one day be lost. The disease we can cure will one day be replaced by the one we cannot. The death prevented has really only been delayed. Our mortality stats are all a bit misleading - the human mortality rate is 100%. We will all face death.

We all need God to finally and ultimately heal the body - which he promises to do in Jesus. God's solution is not a program or a procedure or a pill. He offers us a person - his only Son.

'I am the resurrection and the life' said Jesus. 'The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.'

Jesus raised Lazarus to life - not just life-saving resuscitation, but an act of life-giving, as a man who was dead and buried was brought back to life. But even this act of incredible power is still just a sign pointing forward to Jesus ultimate life-giving act.

Jesus gave us life by giving his life.

Just a few weeks after raising Lazarus from the dead Jesus died on the cross. In his death on the cross, Jesus defeated death by dealing with it's cause - our rebellion against God, which isolates us from God who is the very source of life.

Jesus died to defeat death, but he is the resurrection and the life, so he didn't stay dead. On the third day, undeniably dead, beyond hope of resuscitation, Jesus himself rose, but unlike Lazarus he would not die again. He had defeated death and in his resurrection to life he gave us confidence of that there will come a day for our own resurrection, through faith in him.

God doesn't give us a program or a procedure or a pill, he gives us a person - his Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not come for symptom relief, but definitive management.

Conclusion

But what does this all mean for you?

Well, if you are visiting with us - welcome.

If you work at the Royal Adelaide and have just gone through the chaos and challenge of a major relocation to this end of the city - welcome.

And to those of you serve the people of our city and state in the pursuit of our wellbeing - thank you.

I hope we have seen that God affirms our concern for the wellbeing of one another. We have seen that God is not distant and disinterested in us but is so profoundly concerned that he came as one of us, sharing our weakness and grief and pain. And in this he affirms your concern for the healing of the body.

But he also challenges us to look beyond the brief extent of this life to see that there is something more. We know that life is more than biology. We each recognise glimpses of it in our concern for those we love, the beauty of friendship and the pain of relationships torn apart by death.

And Jesus challenges us to acknowledge that we need definitive management and that he is our only hope.

This is a massive claim, and one that deserves to be investigated and tested. We'd love to help you do this, because we are convinced that knowing Jesus is life changing.

We'd love to chat with you about your questions. We'd love to read the Bible together and see how God speaks into those questions as he helps us see Jesus more clearly. You'll hear more about some of the ways you can do that shortly.

But to finish, friends, Jesus did something in history, that has profound implications for all of history and each one of us. He defeated death and promises to include us in his victory, if only we will trust him. So his promise to Martha came with a question that each of us must consider:

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life,
and he asked "do you believe this?"