**IF YOU HAD BEEN HERE #4 *MM online***

**We’ve been thinking about Martha and Mary’s words to Jesus when their brother, Lazarus, died: *If you had been here, my brother would not have died (Jn. 11:21, 32).* We wondered *how* they said it. We know that Mary said it sorrowfully, because she was weeping (v. 33), but we wondered whether Martha was angry. Either way, we saw how Jesus dealt with them differently: He spoke to Martha about her brother (v. 23), then about Himself (v. 25) as the answer to her need and then He gently challenged her faith (v. 26). With Mary, He simply wept with her and with all the others who were weeping (v. 35). Then, of course, He raised Lazarus from the dead (vv. 43-4).**

**We wondered whether it were true,** ***If you had been here, my brother would not have died.* Jesus said that it was necessary for him to die so that they would see God’s glory (vv. 4, 40). We reflected that healing the sick *can* be a great miracle, but that raising the dead *must be* an even greater one! We thought about how death has a different perspective from heaven (Ps. 116:15) and how Lazarus’s resurrection – and, therefore, his prior death – brought many people to faith in Jesus (12:11). And we tried to see it from Lazarus’s point of view – he had to go through the experience of dying all over again!**

**Death is real and it’s sorrowful and so it should be. We are so aware of this in this current emergency. As Solomon said, there is *a time to die (Ecc. 3:2)….a time to weep* and *a time to mourn (v. 4),* so I do hope these thoughts have helped you to cope with your own sorrow, or, if that doesn’t apply to you at the moment, that, in the future, they *will* help you, for, surely, grief is common to all. But Solomon also said in the same passage in Ecclesiastes 3, there is *a time to heal….a time to laugh* and, even *a time to dance* (vv. 3-4). So, perhaps these thoughts have helped you to heal and comfort others or will do in time. Because, as we have reflected, the sisters said, *If you had been here,* but, ever since Pentecost, Jesus’ reply has been, *I am with you (Mt. 28:20).***

**So, for the last time, I want us to consider those words, *If you had been here, my brother would not have died.* I am going to suggest today that those words represent one of the most pernicious attacks on our faith and happiness. Because those words can be paraphrased as, *If only things were different, then I would be happy.***

**Have you ever thought that? *If only….then….*I suspect you’d have to be a very unusual person *not* to have thought that! Even the genius Albert Einstein, thinking of the destruction that his work led to, said, “If only I had known, I should have become a watchmaker”. And Christians aren’t immune! How many busy Christians have prayed, “If only I had more time,” while many times I have heard frustrated church leaders pray, “Lord, if only You would send us one more committed family, *then* we could evangelise the neighbourhood!”**

**There are two things wrong with all that sighing and praying and “if-onlying”:**

1. **It easily shades into the “why me?” syndrome. Martha and Mary *didn’t* say, “My brother has died: why did it happen to *me*,” but many do!; and**
2. ***If only* is another way of saying, “God, You’ve got it wrong”: my brother *shouldn’t* have died; You *should* have come quicker; You should *make* others help me; You shouldhave given us a *bigger* congregation! It’s like a brunette angrily praying, “God, why didn’t You make me blonde?”!**

***If only* is a sin and it takes us right back to Eden:**

**Gen. 3:1-7**

**“Don’t eat that,” said God, “you’ve got all you need (2:16-17),” but Temptation replied, “*If only* you could, everything would be better….” *If only* is Eve - and I - saying to God, “I’m wiser than You. I’ll eat what I *like*!” And so we have all eaten of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but, because it *hasn’t* made us like God, we can’t tell the difference! We think that “Because I want it” means “It must be good”.**

**Not surprisingly, Jesus saw it differently:**

**Lk. 11:11-13**

**As John has been telling us recently, using the *P.R.A.Y.* acronym, *A* is for *ASK* – ask when you pray! There’s never any harm in *asking* as long as you’re willing for God to reply, “But do you really want that snake? Do you really want that scorpion? I’ve got something better for you.” Even Jesus had a prayer request turned down. Thinking of the horrors that awaited Him the next day, He prayed in Gethsemane, *My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me (Mt. 26:39).* In fact, He prayed it *three* times (vv. 42, 44)! But, actually, His request *wasn’t* turned down because He added a rider to His prayer – *Yet not as I will, but as you will (v. 39).* Didn’t He teach us to pray, *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Mt. 6:10).* How many of us pray that prayer and then indulge in *if only….*?**

***If you had been here, my brother would not have died,* said the sisters, but that was because his death looked like a scorpion or a snake to them: to Jesus, for the reasons we’ve already explored, his death was like a fish or an egg. How can we learn to tell the difference? Well, *we* can’t, because, like Eve, we’re blind to the truth and easily deceived. But Jesus taught us how to discern in that passage in Luke: won’t *your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him (Lk. 11:13)*? He said.**

**Like Jesus, *mourn with those who mourn (Ro. 12:15),* but then pray for them in the *Spirit*, because, as Paul knew, *the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Ro. 8:27b-28).* The Spirit teaches us the difference between scorpions and fish.**

**I think we’ll leave the graveyard now, just as Martha and Mary left it – with their faith and hope in Jesus renewed. I do hope you’ve been challenged and helped by this little series on death and resurrection. Lazarus had to wait four days for his resurrection (Jn. 11:17): we’ve already had ours! As Tim taught us recently in Ephesians 2:6 – *God raised us up with Christ*! It’s already happened. If we *must* experience death before Jesus comes back for us, remember, although it *looks* like a snake or a scorpion, to us it’s *actually* a fish, or, better still, an Easter egg of new, eternal life!**