

Reflection by David Kennedy 18 March 2026

John 5. 20-29

Jesus says, 'The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. ²¹ Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes. ²² The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son, ²³ so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life.

²⁵ 'Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; ²⁷ and he has given him authority to execute judgement, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

In St John's Gospel, the earth-shattering event that triggered the authorities finally to execute Jesus was not his cleansing of the Jerusalem Temple as in the other Gospels, but the raising of his friend Lazarus of Bethany. St John tells us that after this so many people were believing in him that the Jewish authorities thought that the Romans would see it as an uprising and come and destroy the Temple in Jerusalem. The irony is that in John's Gospel Jesus, as the Word made flesh, is the Temple, the place on earth where the divine Presence truly dwells. Lazarus was raised by the voice of Jesus – 'Lazarus, come forth'. The dead man somehow was able to hear the voice of Jesus.

Today's Gospel comes from an earlier chapter in the Gospel, chapter 5. And I want you to note the power of Jesus' voice. 'He says, 'Very truly I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.' When we hear Jesus' words and respond in faith, we enter into eternal life.

But then Jesus universalises this principle to embrace both the living and the dead. He says, 'The hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear it will live'. He is talking about the future dreadful Day of Judgment, but in one sense, the Day is already here and the story of Lazarus illustrates it. The dead Lazarus somehow heard the voice of Jesus calling him back into life.

As Jesus said to Lazarus' sisters, Martha and Mary before he raised him, 'I am the resurrection and the *life*' and as he will say to his disciples at the Last Supper, 'I am the way, the truth and the *life*.'

And then John universalises this even further – 'The day is coming when *all* who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out' – but on that coming Day there will be the separation – those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation. It's a poignant reminder that we are accountable for our deeds; what we do or don't do matters.

In the Good Shepherd narrative, Jesus says – 'My sheep know my voice – my sheep will not follow the voice of strangers because they do not know the voice of strangers'. 'My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me.'

By faith we need not fear the dreadful Day of Judgment. Because in today's Gospel there is a remarkable promise. When we lie in the dust, one day we will hear a voice and wonderfully, we will recognise it – we will hear and recognise the voice of Jesus who calls us into life. And from other passages in the Bible, it gets even better – we will recognise his face, although we have never seen it. What a wonderful thought; what a wonderful promise. Trust the promises of Jesus.