

Lent 5 2020 Readings

Ezekiel 37:1-14, Romans 8:6-11, John 11:1-45, Psalm 130

The Collect

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy... you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act," says the LORD.

Psalm 130 De profundis

1 Out of the depths have I called to you, O LORD;
LORD, hear my voice; *
let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.

2 If you, LORD, were to note what is done amiss, *
O Lord, who could stand?

3 For there is forgiveness with you; *
therefore you shall be feared.

4 I wait for the LORD; my soul waits for him; *
in his word is my hope.

5 My soul waits for the LORD,
more than watchmen for the morning, *
more than watchmen for the morning.

6 O Israel, wait for the LORD, *
for with the LORD there is mercy;

Romans 8:6-11

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

John 11:1-45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother

will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Sermon

The dry bones of a nation, the death of a close friend, and Jesus’ vision of God’s power beyond our present understanding to a future where God’s Word does what is impossible. Both our OT and Gospel readings tell us of God’s power. Put together, the images and the meaning are stretched and strengthened. When we are grieving, weary,

and lacking hope, it may feel like we are gazing on a valley full of bones, but a merciful God whose power is infinite, however, creates hope just when it is needed.

Jesus sees beyond death, and with that same God-given vision, Ezekiel sees the bones coming to life again. Jesus, the prophet, who is hounded throughout his teaching and healing life, unappreciated in his hometown, derided and plotted against, grilled for healing on the Sabbath, drives his followers always to a deeper understanding of God. The prophet Ezekiel, like Jesus, is guided by God's hand and Spirit into the place of grieving, the desolation of the valley of bones. The assumption is that all is lost.

We sadly also know that place, but we often do not recognize it as inhabited by the spirit and the hand of God. Jesus knew the presence of God's power in that place of grief, even his grief for his friend, and several times (6x) speaks confidently in the place of grieving that "nothing is impossible with God."

When Ezekiel prophesies in the valley, the bones rattle. When Jesus cries, "Lazarus, come out!" the dead man rises. It is the power of the word of the Lord that brings life out of death both times. The bones rattle, Lazarus is raised, and Jesus is resurrected. It's all about the power of God.

The people who see Lazarus come out of his tomb are given the ability to believe because Jesus does not do the easy thing (keep bad things from happening), Jesus does the hard thing – he doesn't do what we expect – he waits, he weeps, he orders the stone to be removed, thankfully prays to the Father who hears, commands Lazarus to emerge. No one present is said to believe in Jesus' power. Just the opposite is the case. The crowd does not expect the dead man to emerge when the stone is rolled away - death is final, irrevocable. Human belief is not the source of the rising. Jesus' oneness with the Father is the source of the rising. Jesus sees beyond death to God's infinitely greater power. He demonstrates with thanksgiving and authority that his vision is true.

We aren't born with ready-made faith. Our faith rises as understanding and belief rises – rises in times where death again and again turns to life, life resurrected to something new. Like a bulb turns into a daffodil, a caterpillar turns into a butterfly, strangers act like neighbors, enemies turn to peace, walls no longer divide, a virus turns us all homeward and a different pace of life. Those who watched and unbound Lazarus were given the vision they need. They believed.

Evidence of God making good come from destruction is all around us....

Paul, in Romans, is convinced that because of Christ's life, death, and resurrection a new reality is available for humankind here and now – a new reality, structured by

Christ, by the Spirit, by life. Living in the Spirit, living “in Christ Jesus” (8:1) brings us to a vision, a way of life oriented towards God’s dream for us to live together, to know freedom, joy and peace, to be sure in God’s love and life, through the Spirit that is in us, identified by the grace and sacrament of baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Inseparably dwelling in us through the work of God’s Son.