

Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 29, 2020



Introduction

In today's gospel Jesus reveals his power over death by raising Lazarus from the dead. The prophet Ezekiel prophesies God breathing new life into dry bones. To those in exile or living in the shadows of death, these stories proclaim God's promise of resurrection. In baptism we die with Christ that we might also be raised with him to new life.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, your Son came into the world to free us all from sin and death. Breathe upon us the power of your Spirit, that we may be raised to new life in Christ and serve you in righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Hymn of the Day

Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing

Listen and sing along [here](#).

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones is a promise that Israel as a nation, though dead in exile, will live again in their land through God's life-giving spirit. Three times Israel is assured that through this vision they will know that "I am the LORD."

Read the complete text [here](#).

For the Young at Heart

Dem Bones

There is a fun and familiar song about this text.

Listen, sing - and maybe even dance - along [here](#)!

Psalmody: Psalm 130

Read the complete text [here](#).

Gospel: John 11:1-45

Jesus is moved to sorrow when his friend Lazarus falls ill and dies. Then, in a dramatic scene, he calls his friend out of the tomb and restores him to life.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

In this time of uncertainty, the psalm spoke to me this week. I'm sure people are praying prayers that sound similar to this psalm across the nation, and across the world. I imagine this as a prayer from a patient in the hospital, searching for God in their distress.

From a Christian perspective, this is what I hear: *Out of the depths, from the bottom of my heart, I cry to you, God. Hear me, God! I know you are out there! Turn your ear to my cries.*

Then the prayer takes a turn. *God, if you were to keep a tally of our sins, no one person would be blameless, except for Jesus. God, your nature is that you are the One that forgives, the One worthy of our reverence. I wait for you O Lord. My soul waits. I am waiting! Your word is my hope. God, my soul reaches out for you in need now more than nurses who work the night shift keep an eye out for morning. Even more than those working overtime to develop a cure or a vaccine in the early hours of the morning. Y'all, wait for the Lord, for with the Lord there is steadfast love. Remember, this is God's nature. With the Lord, there is plenteous redemption. For the Lord shall redeem us from all our sins.*

Wow, what a beautiful message. Memories of God's past faithfulness build hope for the present. Though still in the depths, the psalmist adopts a posture of anticipation of how God will respond to the cries of help. "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word, I hope" (v. 5).¹ Even though there is a very present threat up against this person, their prayers can end in praise and thanksgiving for what God does for us in the long run.

From the way Martha acted in the gospel, I believe she would be inclined to pray like the psalmist. Her faith in Jesus is secure. When she goes out to talk to Jesus, she is sure that Jesus could have stopped Lazarus from dying. She sticks to her convictions and says, "I know that if you ask God to act, God will." She has witnessed Jesus do signs and healings before. Following and interacting with Jesus has transformed Martha's heart from holding Jewish convictions, to trusting in what Jesus proclaims.

Martha notes that she knows death does not have the last word in her statement about the resurrection. I wish I could have seen her face when Jesus said, "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," meaning, you can live new life in the Spirit here and now, not just in the resurrection. It seems that she took it well from her reply, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." I think another possible answer could be, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, because I have seen with my own eyes, and have experienced in my heart, transformation that happens in a relationship with you."

In baptism, we were adopted into God's family. There are very real and present threats among us. Yet, we do not fear like those without hope. Even though we may die, we can believe that God sent Jesus, and we can believe in the promise, by the power of God, that we will be resurrected like Jesus one day.

Apostles' Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

**He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.**

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

God who made us all,

Our healers are exhausted, God. Give rest to those who care for the sick.

Our children are bored, God. Grant extra creativity to their caregivers.

Our friends are lonely, God. Help us to reach out.

Our pastors are doing the best they can, God. Help them to know it is enough.

Our workers are jobless, God. Grant us the collective will to take care of them.

Our fellow parents are losing their minds, God.

Bring unexpected play and joy and dance parties to all in need.

Our grocery workers are absorbing everyone's anxiety, God. Protect them from us.

Our elderly are even more isolated God. Comfort them.

We haven't done this before and we are scared, God.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

I don't even know what else to pray for. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

Closing Hymn

What Wondrous Love is This

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Postlude

What Wondrous Love is This

Listen to the St. Olaf Choir perform [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Vicar Natalie Cook.

Prayers were written by Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber.

¹ Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby, Carolyn J. Sharp. **Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship** (Kindle Locations 3354-3356). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.