

***“Jesus Wept!”***

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45  
5th of Lent – April 2, 1017

Ezekiel 37:1-14 (NRSV) The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. {2} He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. {3} He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." {4} Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. {5} Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. {6} I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD." {7} So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. {8} I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. {9} Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." {10} I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. {11} 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.' {12} Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. {13} And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. {14} 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.

Romans 8:6-11 (NRSV) To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. {7} For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law--indeed it cannot, {8} and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. {9} But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. {10} But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. {11} 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 (NRSV) Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. {2} Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. {3} So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." {4} 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." {5} Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, {6} after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. {7} Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." {8} The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" {9} 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. {10} But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." {11} After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." {12} The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." {13} Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. {14} Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. {15} For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." {16} Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." {17} When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. {18} Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, {19} and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. {20} When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. {21} Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. {22} But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." {23} Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." {24} Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." {25} Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, {26} and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" {27} She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." {28} 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." {29} And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. {30} Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. {31} 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. {32} 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." {33} When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. {34} He

said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." {35} Jesus began to weep. {36} So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" {37} But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" {38} Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. {39} 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." {40} Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" {41} So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. {42} 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." {43} When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" {44} 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." {45} Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

You are to be commended. Here on this 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent it can be noted that you have been faithful to this journey we have undertaken together. A journey that has seen us deal with temptation, sin, trusting, and darkness....not easy or comfortable topics. But you have hung in there and it is appreciated. Just a few more days in Lent and next Sunday we finally make it to Jerusalem and the foreshadowing of the joy of Easter in the triumph of Palm Sunday. But, and you always know there is the 'but'...before we get to new life...we have to talk about death. With rattling old bones and a man four days in a tomb we also get to peek at resurrection.

Up in N.C. on the campus of the last church I served there is a cemetery that sits out behind the church. On Easter Sunday mornings it was the custom of that church to gather as daylight was gathering in the central part of that cemetery for the beginning of the easter sunrise service. It was for the most part a fairly somber beginning as the families of this church would make their way past the family grave plots of their loved ones. Little children in attendance, who on other days and Sundays found this to be a great place to play hide and seek, were mostly subdued in their easter finery. On one Easter morning, as was her custom, a grandmother faithfully got up and got her two young granddaughters who were visiting up and leaving the rest of the family sleeping they made way to the church. As they and the other faithful made their way in the dim light out to the large monument which on these Easter Sundays was used as a platform for the service,

the younger of the girls, shivering against the April chill said, 'this is spooky.' Her grandmother said to her echoing no doubt what on some occasion in her own childhood she had been told, "you have to walk by death to get to the resurrection." To get to new life you must traverse death.

That's what this Sunday in Lent is about. It's about reminding us, bracing us, and inviting us to be faithful just a little bit longer and to take a walk before Easter that leads past death. We are invited to walk past the markers of our memories, to remember those that we love who now from the labors rest, and to consider our own mortality as we hang on to each other and we slip past the tombstones, telling every resurrection story we can think of.

Maybe that is why the lectionary gives us John's story about Lazarus on the fifth Sunday of Lent. It is a kind of rehearsal for what lies ahead, in which Jesus does for his friend what God will do for him. It is his and our assurance that there is power at large in the universe that is stronger than death, stronger even than our fear of death, which is able to call us out of our tombs into the fullness and sweet mystery of life.

Bethany was a dangerous place for Jesus to be in those days. Just two miles from Jerusalem, it was in easy reach of the people who had tried to stone him just days before. Jesus had escaped them, and was safely across the river Jordan when word reached him that his old friend Lazarus was ill. Delaying his return, he arrived too late. Lazarus had been dead for days and Jesus had missed

the funeral.

"Come and see," someone said, with all the formal tact of a funeral director, "come and see the body so it will be real for you, so you can accept what has happened." But it was already very real for Jesus, and he did not accept it at all. There is great debate about what and why Jesus was delayed in coming to Bethany. And here in this story, just a few days before Jerusalem the humanity and divinity of Jesus appear. Moved by the emotions of Mary and Martha, touched by their distress, their sadness, their resignation, their failed hopes, Jesus, family friend, almost a brother to the man in the tomb – pauses – *and weeps*.

And then in that moment death is answered by resurrection. John tells the story, "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!" "Unbind him," Jesus said, "and let him go."

Facing life and death in faith means we have opportunity to know that we are not alone, that Jesus stands with us. Jesus loves and calls to us.

In the dim darkness of Lent we are called to come, to walk by death, to remember the tears of Jesus mingling with our own -- and then in joy we can look upon the resurrection and laugh and cry in unbridled joy as we realize that -- death cannot hold him -- and if death cannot hold him -- then death cannot hold Lazarus -- and if not Lazarus then not those whom we so dearly love -- and if not those we so dearly love -- not us!

Today, we find God who resurrects us from the dead, putting an end to it by working through it instead of around it--creating life in the midst of grief, creating love in the midst of loss, creating faith in the midst of despair--resurrecting us from our big and little deaths, showing us by his own example that the only road to Easter morning runs smack through Good Friday.

Jesus began to weep. Jesus shares our tears. Soon after what must have been a wonderful celebration in Bethany Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem. Soon he will hear the 'hosannas.' Soon he will gather the faithful which may have included Mary and Martha and Lazarus at the table around which we gather today. Soon he will hear them cry 'crucify him.' Soon he will experience death. Real death. And soon, if we are faithful, if we wave our palms, and gather at the table, and watch in despair as he dies -- we get to walk past death -- to resurrection glory.