

Lent 5

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March 17, 2002

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, our redeemer, in our weakness we have failed to be your messengers of forgiveness and hope in the world. Renew us by your Holy Spirit, that we may follow your commands and proclaim your reign of love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Ezekiel 37:1-14

{1} 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, prophecy, 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 prophecy, 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.

The dry bones are an image of the exiles in Babylon. They are "dead," without hope. Bone by bone, sinew, flesh and skin the bodies are restored. Then breath/spirit (Genesis 2:7) enters the bodies and hope is renewed and they live. Verses 1-10 are a vision, verses 11-14, an interpretation. *7, 9. Prophecy to these bones, and say to them...prophecy...to the breath:* The prophet declares the divine message in which Yahweh declares his intention to cover the bones with flesh and skin and fill them with breath.

12. prophecy and say to them: Now the prophet is told to declare Yahweh's promise of new life to the "whole house of Israel" in exile.

I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people: This is a different image from that of the unburied bones of verses 110. Matthew 27:52 connects this promise with the resurrection of the saints at the time of Jesus' death.

The pericope is a word of comfort and assurance, of promise and blessing to the exiles in Babylon. The Lord will overcome their despair and fill them with new life; he will open the grave of exile which entombs them and bring them home to Israel. They will know that the Lord is God.

Psalms 130

{1} Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. {2} Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! {3} If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? {4} But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. {5} I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; {6} my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who

watch for the morning. {7} O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. {8} It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

1. *Out of the depths*: "This term refers to 'deep waters' (cf. Isa. 51:10; Exek. 27:34; Ps. 69:2, 14), which are the image of separation from the realm of life and therefore also the image of [*she'ol*] (cf. Jonah 2:3ff.). The 'deep waters' are the kingdom of death, the place of separation from God and of Godforsakenness."

2: The singer prays that his cry will be heard attentively by Yahweh.

3-4: The psalmist expresses his/her understanding of sin and forgiveness.

5. *I wait for the Lord*: "Now there are some who want to dictate the goal, manner, time, and measure for God and at the same time themselves suggest to him how they want him to help them, and if this does not come to them that way, they despair or, if they can, seek help elsewhere. These do not have hope, they do not wait for God...but those who wait for God, they pray for grace, but they freely leave it to God's goodwill when, how, where, and by what means he will help them. About the help they do not despair. But they also do not give it a name.... But he who gives a name to the help, he will not receive it." (M. Luther, WA 1 208).

[1]

6. *those who watch for the morning*: With alarm clocks, and a full-time paid police force, most of us sleep well without worrying about whether the morning will arrive or not. But things were not so secure in the time of the Psalms. The petitioner sings at night and anxiously awaits the arrival of the morning, and the help of Yahweh which comes with the dawn (Psalm 46:5; 90:14; 143:8).

7-8. *with the Lord there is steadfast love*: The psalmist declares his certainty of Yahweh's loyalty to those with whom he has made covenant. He, and no other, will redeem Israel.

The singer's hope is grounded in the confidence that the Yahweh will redeem him/her from all his/her iniquities. Likewise, it is Yahweh who will forgive and redeem Israel from all her iniquities. As a response to the lesson from Ezekiel the Psalm expresses the hope that is fulfilled in the reanimation of the dry bones.

Romans 8:6-11

{6} 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.

6-7: In Romans 8:2 "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" is contrasted with "the law of sin and of death." In verse 6 "the flesh" and "the Spirit" are contrasted.

8-9: In verses 8-9 being "in the flesh" is contrasted with being "in the Spirit." The one reflects to hostility to God while the latter reflects belonging to Christ.

10-11. *though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life.... ...he who raised Christ from the death will give life to your mortal bodies also*: The contrast here is between spiritual life and physical life. However, one who has the one also has the other.

"God raised Jesus from the dead by his Spirit (cf. Rom. 1:4). Now the Christians through their baptism have received the indwelling of the Spirit which raised Jesus from the dead:.... Finally, the first level of resurrection is still expected for the Christians, too: 'he who raised up Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies.' The risen life of the church in the Spirit is an anticipation of the general resurrection at the last day." [2]

John 11:1-45

{1} 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.

1. Bethany: "House of unripe figs" A village on the east slope of the Mount of Olives. Located about 2 miles (3 km) east of Jerusalem, at the site of the present-day village of al-Azariyeh, an Arabic derivation of the Latin, Lazarium. Simon the Leper also lived there Luke (Mark 14:3, etc.), and Jesus ascended to heaven near Bethany (Luke 24:50).

Lazarus...Mary...Martha: Mary will anoint Jesus feet and wipe them with her hair (12:1-8). See also Mark 14:3-9 and parallels for a similar story of anointing at a meal. According to Luke 10:38-42 Mary was eager to listen to Jesus, while Martha was busy with the meal preparation. This Lazarus is not the poor man in Luke 16.

3. the sisters sent a message to Jesus: Jesus is "across the Jordan" according to John 10:40, at the place where John at first baptized, which according to John 1:28 was in Bethany across the Jordan, "not the town near Jerusalem (xi 18), but a site in the Transjordan of which no trace remains." [3] After being summoned Jesus stayed where he was for two more days (verse 6).

4. 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: Jesus' response to Lazarus' illness is similar to his evaluation of the blindness of the man in chapter 9. Both were opportunities for the display of God's power at work through Jesus. In verse 15 Jesus says, Lazarus is dead.

8-16: The disciples first warn Jesus about the danger of going to Judea (see 10:31), and when Jesus remains firm in his decision to go, Thomas exhorts his fellow-disciples to follow Jesus so they may die with him. Thomas' contribution may be a courageous act, or it may be an attempt to divert Jesus by directing his attention to the safety of his friends.

12. "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right": A medical comment. If he is in a

normal sleep he is past the crisis and recovering.

15. *For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe:* Jesus is not being callous or indifferent to the grief of the sisters, but he sees in his absence an opportunity for them to believe.

16: *Thomas:* Thomas is mentioned in John 14:5; 20:24-29; 21:2.

called the twin: Didymos, in Greek.

20-29: Jesus talks with Martha and elicits a statement of faith, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

25-26. *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.:* "In place of the general resurrection on the last day, which Jesus does not occasion (although he subsequently plays a role as judge), Jesus' saying presupposes another resurrection that follows here and now, in the moment in which a man hears and believes the message of Jesus.... The real resurrection takes place for the Evangelist at a time when the general expectation does not suppose it to take place, that is, in the here and now, and it consists of something that does not come into its own in the general expectation: in belief in the Son of God, who possesses the power to raise spiritually from the dead." [4]

27. *the Messiah...the Son of God...the one coming into the world:* Each of these assertions has already been made: 1:41; 1:49; 6:14.

35. *Jesus began to weep*[5]: [*edarysen ho Iesous*] When he saw the grief of Martha and the other mourners he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved (verse 33). Why did Jesus weep if Lazarus' illness and even seeming death was an opportunity to manifest God's power?

37: A reference back to chapter 9.

38-43: Jesus promises Martha that if she believes she will seek the glory of God. Jesus prays to the Father for the sake of the crowd and raises Lazarus.

44: This is not strictly a resurrection, but a resuscitation. However, it is a sign that in Jesus is the power of life. The stories of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:22-24, 35; Luke 8:41-42, 49) and the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-15) are also resuscitations.

45. *Many of the Jews...believed in him:* Jesus' signs written in this book are intended to lead to faith. In verse 8 reference was made to the hostility of the Judeans.

Reflection

Death and resurrection are the themes that permeate the lessons today. The image is that of forgiveness and redemption certified by resurrection and new life. The Psalmist awaits Yahweh's redemption both for himself and for Israel. Ezekiel witnesses and even participates in the reanimation of dead Israel in preparation for her return to her land. The promise to new life for those filled with the Spirit of the Lord is the resurrection of Jesus. And Lazarus points ahead from his resurrection to the greater, more complete and dynamic resurrection of Jesus.

Like the Psalmist we wait in pain for the forgiveness and redemption of the Lord. We wait confidently because we already have the gift of the Spirit, and we have the examples of the past to assure us that God's promises are fulfilled.

The Gospels from John during the season of Lent point out that Jesus had Samaritan believers, blind believers, Judean believers, and even elite believers.

Hymns [6]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

104 --E--In the Cross
97 --D--Christ, the Life
488 --I--Breathe on Me,
711s --P--Psalm 130: Out

295 --P--Out of the
487 --G--Let Us Ever
658v --G--The Word of God
42s, 278, 207, 499

Prayers of the People [7]

P or A: You breathe on a valley of bones and life returns. Breathe your Spirit on us and renew our life as we say "Hear us, O God," and respond, "Your mercy is great."

A: You promise your people life and send proclaimers of your word and presiders for your sacraments among us. Give joy to Telmor our national bishop, the bishop of our synod _____, and our pastor(s) that they may share with us your precious grace. Hear us, O God, Your mercy is great.

A: When war has left scarred land and memories, destruction of homes and livelihoods, and valleys of bones, send your Spirit to heal, build and enliven again. End all wars and bloodshed. Hear us, O God, Your mercy is great.

A: That our daily work may be enlivened by the Spirit of God and that we may know how much any task faithfully done pleases you O Lord. Bless our schools and workplaces. Let us know that we work at your side. Hear us, O God, Your mercy is great.

A: Respond at the right time when those you love are sick or in any special need. In life or death, may God be glorified, especially we remember _____. Hear us, O God, Your mercy is great.

A: For all those who care for the sick and homebound, as Mary and Martha cared for their brother Lazarus, May they trust in Christ as the resurrection and the life. Help us to watch at all times, waiting for the day of Jesus' return. Hear us, O God, Your mercy is great.

P: Let the bones of your Church live again, offering peace to all as well as the forgiveness of our sins. Grant our prayers as it is right for us. Amen.

Or [8]

Presider or deacon

God gives flesh to the dry bones of the dead. As we prepare for the paschal feast, let us earnestly beseech God to breathe on all creatures and call them out of the tomb.

Deacon or other leader

For the holy catholic church throughout the world, sharing the death and resurrection of Christ. For N our bishop, for presbyters and deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For NN our catechumen(s) and NN their sponsors(s).

For all nations, peoples, tribes, clans, and families.

For justice, mercy, and peace in all the world.

For all who are sick, afflicted, or oppressed.

For the dying and the dead, and for those who mourn.

For our families, friends, and companions, and for all those we love.

Presider

Blessed are you, God of the living and the dead, who called your Son from the grave. Receive the prayers we offer this day for those who seek new life in Jesus Christ and for all those in need in every place. Glory to you for ever and ever.

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Notes

[1] Cited in Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 467, note 1.

[2] Reginald H. Fuller, *Preaching the New Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1974, p. 160.

[3] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i-xii): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., vol. 1, p. 44.

[4] Ernst Haenchen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John: Chapters 7-21*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, pp. 62-63.

- [5] The shortest verse in the Bible.
- [6] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rcla9899.txt>
- [7] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_a2.txt
- [8] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>