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 Fourth Sunday of Lent

Resurrection
Ezekiel 37:1-7, John 11 selections

John 11:selections

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,^[a] "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^[b] was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

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¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus^[d] had already been in the tomb four days. 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.^[f] 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,^[g] the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

.... 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.”*

The dry bones, and the raising of Lazarus are some **powerful stories of resurrection**, aren't they?

Definitely something important to think about as we approach Easter. Can you **even imagine** a valley of dry bones? Can you picture it? And then seeing that valley of dry bones, Come to life?

*Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause **breath**^[a] to enter you, and you shall live... and you shall **know that I am the Lord.***

That word for breath is the Hebrew word for Spirit—**ruach**. Similar to **pneuma** in the New Testament, the Greek word for wind, breath, and Spirit.

Think about that—it is the **Spirit of God bringing life!** Ezekiel watches as the dry bones take on flesh, And then, the Lord breathes into them, And they are **resurrected!** They stand on their feet, **a vast multitude**. And the Lord says, “*Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. **Amazing** to think about, isn't it?*”

Equally amazing is the story of the **raising of Lazarus!** This story is **only found** in the Gospel of John, and it happens as his ministry is winding down, and his **path to the cross** is beginning. It is just after this story of Lazarus that we read how the Jewish authorities are **plotting to kill him!** His raising Lazarus to new life signals **the end of his life!**

In this story is one of the “**I AM**” statements in John's Gospel. Jesus I am the... *bread, light, door, shepherd, way, vine,* and here Jesus says ‘I Am the resurrection and life’.

Lazarus' sisters Mary and Martha, send word to Jesus that Lazarus is gravely ill. And Jesus does NOT come right away. In fact, he says, "*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.*"

But Lazarus **DOES die**, and Jesus, weeping, comes to his tomb--- four days after his death! But then the unbelievable happens-- Jesus says to the dead man, ***Lazarus come out!*** And he is resurrected—by the one ***who will become THE resurrection.***

This ***theme of resurrection and new life, is all throughout*** the Bible! And it's so important for our lives today!

The breath of God creates ***humans from dust*** in Genesis, In ***Isaiah 35*** the Lord speaks of life blooming in the dry desert, All throughout the ***prophets and psalms*** we see this talk of new life, and we've got these dry bones coming back to life, and ***Lazarus*** coming back from the grave!

But all of it is just a ***preamble to the ultimate story of resurrection---*** of ***permanent*** resurrection, and new life: After Jesus is crucified and laid in the tomb, three days later ***God defeats the power of death forever, when Jesus is raised from death!***

Paul says in ***1 Corinthians 15: For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; ²² for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.***

We will not all die, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, ... "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

⁵⁵ *"Where, O death, is your victory?*

Where, O death, is your sting?"

thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

Thanks be indeed!

That's ***who we are, and what we believe—***
We ***Christians are resurrection people!***

Do you *wonder what life would be like* without the promise of resurrection and new life?

Have you ever been to a *funeral* that had no talk of resurrection?
Or eternal life?

I remember talking to someone who had *attended a service like that*, and she said it was nice to remember the person, to hear some stories and see some pictures, but after that there was a feeling of *emptiness*. No one really knew what to do or say. She said it was *bizarre* to leave a funeral with literally no hope—*no hope of resurrection, or eternal life*.

Yesterday David Barnett's stepson Christopher, a Lutheran pastor and hospice chaplain, stopped me after David's memorial and said how much he appreciated my talking about resurrection and eternal life. He said that as a chaplain he attends many memorials that just talk about the deceased, with no mention of resurrection or eternal life. That without that, where is the hope?

I told him how much I agreed with him, for *we are resurrection people, right?* The *foundation of our faith* is the promise of new and eternal life. This is where we find our *REAL hope*.

But sometimes we need to be *reminded of that hope*, don't we? Because *life is a mess!* Just as surely as we know that God is good—all the time, we also know that *life is messy, all the time*, right?

We try to *make sense* of this messy world, our messy lives, we try to *explain* things with 'it must be God's will', or *maybe this is what I deserve*.

We all too often connect tragedies to sin, just as people have always done. Last week we talked about the passage just before Lazarus, in John 9—the *man born blind* that Jesus healed—remember it? when asked by his disciples,

who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

Jesus replied, "**Neither this man nor his parents sinned**; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.

And in Luke 13:1-5 Jesus said "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were **worse sinners** than all other **Galileans**? 3 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. 4 Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were **worse offenders** than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

Jesus says in Matthew 5:45:

God makes the **sun** rise on the evil and on the good,
and sends **rain** on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

In other words, **life is just a mess**.

We are all sinners, and all creation is fallen.

Good and bad things happen to everyone,

and we don't have a God who gives us what we deserve—**thank goodness!**

We have a God who **sent his only Son** into the world to be here with us,
as **one of us**, to know our **pain**, and experience the **mess of life**.

We have a **God who suffered** crucifixion and death!

Hebrews 4:15-16 says ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested^[d] as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore **approach the throne of grace** with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

As we walk through the mess of life,

We have **help**—from our Lord and Savior Jesus,

We have **mercy**—from his throne of grace,

And we have the **ultimate hope**---in new and eternal life,

For we are **resurrection people!**

So, **where are the dry bones** in your life?

Where are the **dry desert places**?

Where do you **need new life**, in this mess called life?

I think we can all think of times and places where we feel
kind of *dead, lifeless, or dry like a desert, or a valley of dry bones.*

Is it in your job? Or school?
Is it in your home?
Is it in your heart?

Where do you *need resurrection* and new life?

And do you realize that *wherever there is a desert,*
Wherever there is death---that's exactly where the Spirit of God
can bring YOU new life!

So I wonder, *how can we, like Lazarus, be released* from death?
What does it mean for Jesus to say to us---come out of that tomb!
Unbind him, and let him go!

What is binding us in life?
Are we bound by Anxiety? Or Fear?
What about Loss? Or Grief?

What does it mean for Jesus to say to us—*unbind her, and let her go?*
Are we bound in the grave clothes of doubt or confusion?
What about oppression, or isolation?

Think about that for a minute.
Where in your life, is the dry desert?
The valley of bones?
The tomb?

Now think about this:
Our God is in the *business*
Of bringing the *dry and the dead—back to life!*
All the dry and dead places in our lives, our hearts, our homes, our world.
Even that which seems beyond hope, can receive new life!
Even physical death—is *not the end!*
We are resurrection people!
We believe in the Spirit of God---who breathes new life!

In Revelation 21, we hear what God has to say about the final resurrection:
Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, ... And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."

Friends---Jesus is our resurrection and life!
He is the one who brings the dry and desert places back to life---now and forever.

That is our ***Good News of the Gospel!***

May we ***believe*** it, ***live*** it,
and ***share*** the good news of resurrection!
And May we ***BE resurrection people!***
Amen.