

Ezekiel 37:1-14

John 11:1-45

RESURRECTION BEFORE EASTER?

Today's Lectionary readings seem quite surprisingly out of sequence while we are still walking our Lenten journey with Jesus, because they both dramatically tell of miraculous human resurrection.

After all, we are still *three weeks* from celebrating Easter, our Lord's resurrection.

It is certain that when they chose these passages, the Lectionary committee knew nothing about the devastating pandemic that would take over the entire world this year.

But isn't it encouraging to us to be reminded of God's miracles, in particular for restoring lost lives, in the face of such a terrifying plague?

Now I am not in any way saying that God caused this pandemic.

But I am saying that God will bless us with hope, faith, courage and wisdom to deal with it every day

until this evil is defeated.

One detail that I love in our passage from Ezekiel
is right at the beginning.

God doesn't call to Ezekiel; *he puts his hand upon him.*

He picks him up, carries him, and sets him down
in the valley of dry human bones.

God walks the prophet around these piles of bones,
then asks him if they can live.

Ezekiel is no fool.

He doesn't say, "No, God, how could they?

They're not even connected anymore as skeletons!"

The prophet wisely answers, "O LORD God, you know."

Well, of course he does.

God knows everything, including his plans
for these long dead bones.

When God does instruct Ezekiel, he is very specific
about what he should prophesy to the bones.

Let's remember that here "prophesy" means to speak for God.

God is going to reconnect all the skeletons and rebuild

all the soft tissues necessary for human life.

But still missing is the breath of Life, the Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel is told to call to the four winds (the four corners of the world)

to give God's breath to those who had died,

and as he does, the breath does indeed come into them all.

They live.

They rise.

An enormous crowd.

God's instructions to Ezekiel continue, pointing out

that the previously dead bones are the entire house of God's people, Israel,

who have lost their hope and feel abandoned.

God's message to them is that God will act so they will know for sure

that he is the LORD, resurrecting them from their *spiritual* death

and feelings of desolation,

renewing their hope and faith with the gift of his Holy Spirit

inside them.

Nothing is impossible for God,

and nothing can cause him to abandon his people.

The raising of Lazarus is a familiar story,

but let's take a look at some details we often don't think about.

Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha in Bethany were dear friends to Jesus.

It always seems surprising that Jesus seems indifferent when he gets the sisters' message about their brother's illness.

His reaction is that the illness will not lead to death, but will serve to glorify the Son of God.

(The Holy Spirit spoke this same verse to me in 2008 when I asked the Lord why I had been so unemotional when I learned I had a severely advanced and dangerous cancer.)

After Lazarus dies, Jesus tells his disciples he is going to Bethany to rouse his friend.

The disciples are more concerned about the dangers that await them on the road, yet they agree to travel with him.

We may be surprised that it's Martha, not Mary,

who rushes out to Jesus, to chide him for not coming in time,
and yet also admits that she knows God will do as he asks
if he prays for Lazarus to come back to life.

When she speaks of the resurrection of the dead at the end of life
on earth, Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life.

Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.”

Eternally.

This is one of the core beliefs of our faith.

When he challenges Martha, she says she believes that he is the Messiah,
the Son of God.

Martha returns to the house and tells Mary about Jesus,

so now Mary--his faithful follower at times—

rushes out to see Jesus on the road to their house.

She too chides Jesus for delaying his arrival:

he could have healed Lazarus.

After asking where his friend is buried, Jesus sees the sisters and

all the Jews who had come to comfort them as they go to the tomb,

weeping.

He cries, too.

As a side note, among the people are those who had doubted Jesus as the healer of the blind man, yet now they ask each other, “If he restored sight to the blind man, couldn’t he have healed Lazarus before death took him?” How often people want Jesus to think and act the way they do!

At the tomb, Jesus asks to have the large stone rolled away, despite Martha’s protest that four days have gone by, so the body would smell awful.

Jesus reminds her, and all listening, that he had said if they had faith they would see the glory of God.

The stone is removed, Jesus prays out loud to the Father to *thank him for answering his prayer* on behalf of Lazarus, and then he shouts into the tomb: “Lazarus, come out!”

And so he does.

The burial cloths are removed, and he goes home with his sisters.

Many in the crowd did indeed believe in Jesus

because they themselves had witnessed his miracle of resurrection.

Sisters and brothers, miracles still happen,

because God is always present and loves his people.

Let us pray together, wherever we are:

LORD God, you are the author of life.

Only you can restore physical life into a long-dead body.

And only you can restore spiritual life that has long been missing.

We thank you, we glorify you, we worship you,

and we count on you, especially during these devastating times,

to bless us with continuing faith and health.

In your precious name we pray,

Amen.