



Fifth Sunday of Lent 2005

Ezekiel 37:12-14 Romans 8: 8-11 John 11: 1-45

Most people when they think about Ezekiel recall his dramatic vision of the dry bones and the Negro Spiritual that was inspired by it. Take an opportunity to read the whole story from verse one to fourteen so that you feel the full power of the story.

Dry bones are a common sight on farms and in the back country where animals fall into ravines or die by predator. Small creatures leave the bones clean and they lie bleached among the tussock.

The bones in Ezekiel's vision are the bones of those slain in battle, silent witnesses to the futility of war. Now imagine the scene where a dull rattle is heard; bones coming together, sinews connecting, muscle and tendon adding form, and skin rebuilding identity. A silent army stands on the plain, silent because there is no spirit, no breath to animate it.

"Come from the four winds, O mighty Spirit,
breathe into these people my spirit
so that they may resettle the land."

This wonderful vision story is placed with the story of the raising of Lazarus. The sisters of Lazarus send word to Jesus, "The beloved is dead." Jesus hears the message and comes to comfort his friends. Martha, impatient to see him, leaves her friends and relations who are taking part in the mourning rites, and runs to meet Jesus.

She proclaims her belief that Jesus is a prophet. She shows in her speech that she sees Jesus as an intermediary, someone so close to God as to be able to work wonders. In the light of this understanding, Jesus presents Martha with a new vision. As she has run out to meet him so he invites her to go further on her spiritual journey.

She says, "I know he will rise again."

She believes as the Pharisees do, in a final resurrection, an aspect of the last days.

Jesus replies, "I am the resurrection and the life: whoever believes in me, though they should die, will come to life; and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die."

Jesus moves resurrection from a future event to a present reality. This is probably one of the most astonishing aspects of John's theological understanding. Resurrection comes with belief and this resurrection will not

end in death. Most Christian people still believe that resurrection is something that belongs after death. The life described as resurrection is not human life but divine life – life from above, this gift transcends everything even death itself.

Martha shows that her grasp of Jesus' words is incomplete as she professes her faith in the language of the traditional understanding of Messiahship.

As with the crippled man whose sin is forgiven Jesus uses an outward sign, a sacrament, to show that God's authority is universal.

"Take away the stone!"

"Lord it has been four days now."

Because she does not fully comprehend she will be given a sign.

In John's earlier description of the work of the Son he echoes the vision of Ezekiel. "...then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and have you rise from them." Ez. 37:13

"Indeed, just as the Father possesses life in himself so he has granted it to the Son to have life in himself... for an hour is coming in which all those in their tombs shall hear his voice and come forth." John 5:26-28. Jesus life-giving activity is affirmed. The creative work of God carries on through the Son.

Jesus himself will end his life in death. There is no exception. All that is human will die. If the Spirit of God who raised Jesus is in you, you have Life and this Life will continue forever.

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