**Weekend of Sunday, March 26, 2022**

**5th Sunday in Lent/Year A**

**First Reading:**

**Second Reading:**

**Gospel Reading: John 11:1-45**

***“Faith, Hope, and the Power of God”***

**Theme**

*In today’s gospel Jesus reveals his power over death by raising Lazarus from the dead. The prophet Ezekiel prophesies God breathing new life into dry bones. To those in exile or living in the shadows of death, these stories proclaim God’s promise of resurrection. In baptism we die with Christ that we might also be raised with him to new life. At the Easter Vigil we will welcome the newly baptized as we remember God’s unfailing promise in our baptism. In today’s gospel Jesus reveals his power over death by raising Lazarus from the dead. The prophet Ezekiel prophesies God breathing new life into dry bones. To those in exile or living in the shadows of death, these stories proclaim God’s promise of resurrection. In baptism we die with Christ that we might also be raised with him to new life. At the Easter Vigil we will welcome the newly baptized as we remember God’s unfailing promise in our baptism.*

**Texts:**

**First Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14**

1The 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. 2He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. 3He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord God, you know.” 4Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. 5Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 6I 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.”
 7So 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. 8I 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. 9Then he said to me, “Prophesy 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.” 10I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.
 11Then 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.’ 12Therefore 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. 13And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 14I 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.”

**Second Reading: Romans 8:6-11**

6To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7For 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, 8and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
 9But 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. 10But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11If 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.

**Gospel: John 11:1-45**

1Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 3So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” 4But 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.” 5Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.
 7Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” 8The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” 9Jesus 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. 10But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” 11After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” 12The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” 13Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. 15For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” 16Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

 17When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” 23Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” 24Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” 25Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” 27She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

 28When 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.” 29And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31The 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. 32When 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.” 33When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” 35Jesus began to weep. 36So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” 37But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

 38Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39Jesus 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.” 40Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” 41So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42I 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.” 43When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44The 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.”

 45Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

**Sermon**

There is some context that is required to understand what is going on in today’s Gospel Reading.

In the previous chapter, we read that Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem in the province of Judea for the Feast of the Dedication. While there, Jesus did what he always did; he preached and taught and performed signs and miracles. But while there, a gathering of religious leaders, those whom John simply calls the Jews, stopped him and insisted that he tell them whether he was the Christ or not, and when he didn't give them a straight answer, they attempted to stone him but he escaped. Ironic, don’t you think? He did amazing signs and miracles that could only be done by someone blessed by God, and they just can’t have that, reasoned the religious leaders and so they attempted to stone him, but he managed to escape.

From there,

40He [Jesus] went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. 41Many came to him, and they were saying, "John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true." 42And many believed in him there.

MAP

And that is where Jesus and his disciples were, at Bethany Across the Jordan, when he got word that his friend Lazarus was deathly ill and his sisters, Mary and Martha, sent for him. According to Google, the trip back to Bethany in Judea on foot would have taken just about twelve hours.

However, despite noting that Jesus loved “Martha and her sister and Lazarus,” he stayed in Bethany Across the Jordan for two more days!

7Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” 8The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?”

And then finally, in verse 11ff. of today’s Gospel Reading, Jesus cryptically told the disciples that they will go to Bethany in Judea, but also told them before they left, that Lazarus has died. And except for his encounter with Martha first and then Mary, who gave him a stern talking to about his timeliness, none of this really matters. The real point of the story is what happened next - the raising of Lazarus. This powerful story teaches us several important lessons about faith, hope, and the power of God to bring new life and healing to our lives.

One of the first things we can learn from this story is the importance of faith. Lazarus was very ill, and his sisters, Mary and Martha, had faith that Jesus could and would come and heal him. Even though Jesus did not come as quickly as they wanted him to, they still had faith that he would come and help them. This faith is an example to us that we should trust in God, even when things seem impossible. We should have faith that he is always working for our good and that he will bring new life and healing to our lives. However, sometimes it comes in ways we had not expected.

A second important lesson we can learn from this story is the power of hope. Even though Lazarus had been dead for four days, and his body was already beginning to decay, Jesus still had hope that his Heavenly Father could bring him back to life. This teaches us that no matter how dire our situation may seem, we should never give up hope. We should always hold on to the belief that God is able to work miracles and bring new life to our situations.

Thirdly, we learn from this story that Jesus is not only "the resurrection and the life" but also has the power and authority over the resurrection and the life. When he came to the tomb of Lazarus, knowing that he is going to raise Lazarus from the dead, Jesus said something very powerful to Martha,

25“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” 27She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

This is a powerful statement that Jesus is not just a man with special abilities that can be stoned to death or run out of town. He *is* the resurrection and the life. It's through faith in him that we can have the hope of life eternal.

Finally, we can learn from this story the importance of being open to God’s timing. The sisters sent for Jesus to come to heal Lazarus, but Jesus did not come right away. Instead, he waited until Lazarus had been dead for four days. This teaches us that we should be open to God’s timing. God knows what is best for us, and God will work in God's perfect timing.

Now I know this last learning is probably the one we have the most trouble with. We live in a world where we can demand getting what we want when we want it. But it seems God, in God’s infinite wisdom, is not changed by our priorities. It seems there is value, virtue, something to be learned about waiting on God and God’s perfect timing.

**Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

The story of the resurrection of Lazarus teaches us the importance of

* faith,
* hope,
* the power of Jesus as the resurrection and the life,
* and the importance of being open to God’s timing.

Let us have faith in God, hope in the promises of God, have an unwavering belief in Jesus as the resurrection and the life, and trust in his perfect timing.

**Prayer**

Merciful God, when things are going well in our lives we find it easier to trust you. But ironically, when things seem to go awry, we turn in on ourselves and are in despair. We know why you gave us your Son as the model of the godly life – for he demonstrates for us what it means to trust you in all circumstances. But knowing better doesn't always mean we do better. Continue to send us your Holy Spirit so that in all the circumstances of our lives we turn to you. We pray this in Jesus's name. Amen