

READINGS

Ezekiel 37 : 1-14

Romans 8 : 6-11

John 11 : 1-45

Psalm 130

INTRODUCTIONS

These may be included in the Parish Magazine, in the weekly service sheet, or by the lector as an introduction to the readings.

Ezekiel 37 : 1-14

The thought of God-given new life pervades today's readings. At the time of Ezekiel's vision, Jerusalem was derelict and the land laid waste. He sees nothing but dried-up bones, until the breath of God - the Spirit of God - fills the valley with life. It is a sign that God will give new life to his people Israel.

Romans 8 : 6-11

Paul says that if the Spirit of God is in you, if the breath of God inspires you, then your whole body contains real life and you can go like the wind instead of wasting away into death and decay.

John 11 : 1-45

This is a longer Gospel reading than usual, so that we miss nothing of the extraordinary event at Bethan. God in Jesus does indeed bring new life, even to the dead, for he raises his friend Lazarus from the tomb.

PRAYERS

Collect One

We beseech thee, Almighty God,
look upon the hearty desires of thy humble servants,
and stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty,
to be our defence against all our enemies;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect Two

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ
delivered and saved the world:
Grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross,
we may triumph in the power of his victory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Post Communion Prayers

God of hope,
in this eucharist we have tasted
the promise of your heavenly banquet
and the richness of eternal life.
May we who bear witness to the death of your Son,
also proclaim the glory of his resurrection,
for he is Lord for ever and ever.

Most merciful God,
you saved humankind
by the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ.
Through this sacrament,
strengthen our faith in him who suffered on the cross,
so that we may triumph in the power of his victory.
For he lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Almighty God,
you alone can bring into order
the unruly wills and affections of sinners:
Grant your people grace
to love what you command and desire what you promise;
that, among the swift and varied changes of the world,
our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.
1979 Book of Common Prayer

Traditional

Almighty God,
look mercifully on your family,
that by your great goodness
they may be governed and preserved forever
in body and soul;
through your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

OR, modernised traditional

Almighty God,
look in mercy on your family.
By your great goodness,
guide and protect us forever
in body and soul.
We ask this through your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

OR, alternative

The Fifth Sunday in Lent - 10th April, 2011

(Let us pray that by faith in Christ we may share in his victory. *[silence]*)
Most merciful God,
you saved humankind
by the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ.
Strengthen our faith in him who suffered on the cross,
so that we may triumph in the power of his victory.
For he lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

OR, new

(Let us pray that we remain united with Christ. *[silence]*)
Jesus our Saviour,
thank you for coming to give us life
through your suffering and death.
Keep us following you
wherever you lead us,
because we know that you have promised
to take us home to God.
For you live and reign
with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Loving God our Father, we see your compassion revealed in the tears of Jesus for Lazarus his friend. Look today upon the distress of your church, mourning and praying for your children dead in their sins. By the power of your Spirit call them back to life. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

God is more ready to hear our prayers than we are to utter them.

Let us pray for other people.

Source of life, God of love, let your salvation surround the living who walk under the shadow of death and the dead who are gloriously alive.
Great Spirit-Friend,
Come with your life and light.

Be close to your dying children. By simple faith in your undying grace may they have peace in the hour of their departing.
Great Spirit-Friend,
Come with your life and light.

Be close to people who caught up in the rawness of a new grief. Enable them to weep well, free from bitterness or despair.
Great Spirit-Friend,

Come with your life and light.

Be close to all who care for the dying; in hospitals or at home, in a hospice or on a battlefield; give them your quiet strength.

Great Spirit-Friend,

Come with your life and light.

Be close to ministers, priests and lay pastors, who pray with the dying, minister last rites, or sit holding a hand.

Great Spirit-Friend,

Come with your life and light.

Be close to those who fight against untimely death. Those who spend their days working for the elimination of cancer, aids, many diseases; the carnage on our highways, and the butchery of warfare.

Great Spirit-Friend,

Come with your life and light.

Be close to the preachers of the gospel of peace. By your tireless Spirit, may inadequate words take flesh and become powerful agents in helping people to begin living eternal life now. *Through Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Amen!

SERMON STARTERS

EZEKIEL 37:1-14: Ezekiel was a prophet to the people of Israel in exile in Babylon. They were as devoid of political hope and possibility for national restoration as the field of dead bones of the slain shown him by the Lord. God directed Ezekiel to breathe life into the people in exile with the promises of his word. The comparison is reminiscent of God breathing into the nostrils of the first man to make him a living creature. The change to a picture of future opened graves gives promise that in the future the nation will be returned to its 'own soil', namely in Jerusalem and Israel. They will know thereby that the Lord has spoken.

ROMANS 8:6-11: Christ has met the complete requirement of God's law which God had rightly demanded of all people. Believers in Christ have in this way been set free from the law of sin and death. Therefore no believing Christian can set his or her mind on the things of the 'flesh', ie sinful pleasures and evil which belong to the old sinful nature. Those things militate destructively against the Spirit's indwelling. Even though a Christian is still afflicted bodily by sin, yet the life of the Spirit imparts life, just as the Spirit raised Jesus from the dead.

JOHN 11:1-45: The high point in this miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead is the revelation of Jesus as Son of God and the Messiah. The proof of this brought to a head the fanatical opposition of the religious leaders which resulted not long afterwards in his arrest, trial and execution in Jerusalem. While his full humanity is prominently evident in his emotional response to the grief of Mary, Martha and their friends, his divinity is manifested above all other considerations. He is seen to have foreknowledge of Lazarus's death and what he would do to glorify God. Jesus teaches clearly that there is everlasting life through believing in him. He proves this by raising a body already into the stage of decomposition.

SERMONS - WEB SOURCES

Out of the depths: Starting with the quotation from the Psalm, "Out of the depths I have called to you O Lord", the link to the Gospel is made: "Out of the depths they called to Jesus. Mary and Martha were in dire straits. The way they'd been living was in many ways exactly in tune with Jesus' radical call; they lived with their brother Lazarus and remained "unattached," a path that gave them a great deal of freedom, including the freedom to be extravagantly generous, as Mary was when she poured out ointment worth a year's wages for many onto Jesus' feet." There is a moving quotation from a mother whose child has died - it is almost a modern psalm. The conclusion leads to the resurrection via the thought, "When we cry out from the depths, God hears. When Jesus seems slow in coming, he is coming nonetheless. And if we worry that it is too late, Jesus shows that it is never too late."

http://www.sarahlaughed.net/lectionary/2005/03/fifth_sunday_in.html

The confession of St Martha: A wonderful short biblical exposition on Martha. "She goes directly to meet Jesus as he is coming into town -- and then confronts him in the road just outside the city: *"If you had been here, my brother would not have died."* What courage -- what chutzpah! And then, in response to Jesus' question: "Do you believe?" we have her wonderful words of faithful affirmation, *"Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the One who is coming into the world."*

"There you have it: The Confession of Saint Martha. I think it bears noting that the same profession of faith that earned Peter an extra feast day in the liturgical calendar has not garnered Martha the same reward. It *could* be a case of gender bias in action -- or it could just be an honest oversight: with all the attendant drama over the raising of Lazarus from the dead I suppose one could be excused from overlooking the confession part of the story. But I think another feast day for Martha is worth lobbying for. I believe her example is worth emulating."

<http://www.thewitness.org/article.php?id=768>

Episcopal Sermons that work: Links the vision of Ezekiel of the valley of dry bones with the insights of Paul in today's epistle, and relating both to the witness of Martha in the gospel. The theme throughout is that communities must be redeemed. "As a part of our Lenten journey we are given yet another opportunity to walk a path toward restoration with Jesus. But we must walk that path as a community so that there may be a resurrection into new life. We are reminded that only God gives life. These stories give us hope that God will continue to give life even over death."

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons_that_work_58308_ENG_HTM.htm

The fear of death: Sermon based on Ezekiel's vision deals with people's fear of death. When a baby is born, and lies in its adoring mother's arms, there is only one prediction about that child that we can make with absolute certainty: It shall die.

Death is our universal fate. It is the fate of individuals, families and nations. When Ezekiel had his extraordinary experience of a valley filled with human bones, it was the death of the Jewish people that he was seeing. His people were either dead or dying: decimated by conquering armies, a few surviving in a ravaged countryside, a few thousand surviving as captives in a far land. He saw the death of his people, the death of hope.

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"We all have a basic fear of death, genetically passed down from our distant ancestors. I don't believe people who claim that death in no way disturbs them. Just put them in a doctor's consulting room, and watch them being told that they cancer or aids, and you will see the veneer crack". From this all too realistic start the sermon develops to the action of Jesus - "In the story, Jesus backs up this message with the word of command. Standing in front of the tomb, Jesus cries: "Lazarus come out!" And the dead man came out, his hands and feet trailing the burial clothes, and a napkin still across his face."

'This story was very precious to the early Christians. Jesus was not only raised from the dead on Easter Day, but with him came the promise that we too would be raised. *"Because I live, you shall live also."*

<http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocA/24LENT5.htm>