

The 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, “Prophecy 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^[a] 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^[b] 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, “Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath:^[c] Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath,^[d] 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 prophecy 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.”

⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit^[a] 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,^[b] 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, then the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit^[c] is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus^[d] from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through^[e] his Spirit that dwells in you.

Now 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,^[a] “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^[b] 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.”^[c] 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,

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

who was called the Twin,^[d] said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus^[e] had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹ 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.”

²⁸ When 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.” ²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ The 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. 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

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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.”

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

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Our first reading is always startling — the land of dry bones. Imagine this scene of a valley filled with human bones, dry, bare, desiccated in the hot sun. And Ezekiel brings them to life again, through prophesying in God's name. As he writes:

So 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. (Ezek 37:7)

Such descriptive power! A *rattling*. Of course! What other noise could dry bones make? And the scene which follows seems to come out of a horror movie about zombies, as the bones clothe themselves in sinews and flesh and skin, and then stand up, as the breath of life comes back into them.

This act of God was meant to impress Ezekiel, and us through the Bible. God's power is great, greater than death, and even long-dead, decayed bodies may come back to life, if God wills it so. But it is important to understand why God did this. If we go back a chapter, we read the words of the Lord, as told to Ezekiel:

The word of the Lord came to me: Mortal, when the house of Israel lived on their own soil, they defiled it with their ways and their deeds ... So I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land and for the idols with which they had defiled it. I scattered them among the nations ... But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that it was said of them, "These are the people of the Lord, and yet they had to go out of his land." ... Therefore say to the house of Israel:

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Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. I will sanctify my great name ... and the nations shall know that I am the Lord.

(Ezek 36:16-23)

God acts, in this case, for the sake of his holy name. His honour and reputation have been sullied. In today's lingo, God has been disrespected. The people of Israel, through ignoring God's word and going after foreign gods, have dishonoured God, causing foreign peoples to lose respect for God. With loss of respect comes lack of understanding who God is. If God is to save all his peoples, then they must come to a good understanding of and relationship with God. God is all-powerful, and if the other nations think that God cannot even control his own peoples, then they lose respect for him.

Part of the mission which Jesus sent us on is to spread the true word of God, to tell of his greatness and the wonderful things that he has done. In that sense we are all ambassadors for God. Other people, who do not know Jesus Christ as their Lord, learn about him through us. God will keep his name holy and undefiled. It is for the sake of that name, and as an example and lesson for the other nations who did not know God, that the dry bones were brought back to life.

God's name is not just a title but the essence of who God is. When we pray, "Hallowed by your name," we are not just referring to a three-letter word, G-o-d, we are speaking of the reality, the essence,

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

the the essential being of God. And when we hallow that name, we respect the almighty being who bears the name.

And so the dry bones were brought back to life, as a demonstration of God's power. Similar things occur in Jesus' time, and we have today in our Gospel the story of Lazarus brought back from the dead. In this case, we see that Jesus did have a strong personal connection to Lazarus, and to his sisters; he loved them and is truly grieved when Lazarus dies and he sees the grief of Mary and Martha. We have that wonderful verse, the shortest in the Bible: "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). Some translations have it as "Jesus began to weep," but I prefer the shorter version. This scene is so affecting because of Jesus' humanity shining through. He has human love for his friends, as well as divine love for them.

But at the same time, Jesus raises Lazarus as a demonstration of power and mercy. He tells the disciples, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe" (11:15). It is important that the disciples and other people see this resurrection. We may also see it as a foreshadowing of Jesus' own death and resurrection. Jesus goes to Lazarus' home, knowing that he is already dead, and intending to perform this deed of power.

When he gets there, though, he encounters the human side of this event. First Martha and then Mary tell him that if he had been there, their brother would not have died. It is an indictment of Jesus for tarrying too long before arriving. The sisters' faith is strong and they trust in Jesus, but their sorrow is also great. Jesus is touched by this, and just like any one of us may do when faced with the grief of one we love, he weeps. I think this show of emotion on Jesus' part is one of the most touching scenes in the Gospels. He weeps in sympathy with the sisters' sorrow, even though he knows

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he will give Lazarus back to them. The people around him say, "See how he loved him!" (v36). Jesus is described as "greatly disturbed" (v38). Perhaps he weeps for the human condition as well, pitying his people because so many of them face death, if they do not follow him. Remember his lament over Jerusalem:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!
(Matthew 23:37)

Jesus wants so much to help his people, but they too often do not accept his help, his love and his compassion. So sometimes he tries to shock his people, to wake them up, as with his allowing Lazarus to die before stepping in to resurrect him. Recall that Jesus said, "For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe." He planned what he would do, and although it may seem heartless at a human level to put the sisters through such grief, the greater good is for them and others to truly believe in Jesus and thus save themselves.

This entire episode underscores the seriousness of Jesus' message to us. We are not talking about feel-good Christianity. We are talking about the salvation of the world. If we do not put our faith in God through Christ, we will die, and we will not be resurrected. Lazarus was brought back to show Jesus' power, and also to show that those who have faith in Jesus, like Lazarus and his sisters, will rise again with Jesus. In both stories, the dry bones and the raising of Lazarus, death is defeated and Jesus is the victor. Because of his power, Jesus can save us. Because of his love for us, Jesus wants to save us. And because of our faith, Jesus will save us. Thanks be to God. Amen.