



Rev Helen Jacobi
Breadcrumbs
Year A, Lent 5
Ezekiel 37:1-14
John 11:1-45
26 March 2023

Spirit, water, living water, sight/insight, death and life.

A few of the multiple themes we have found in our Lenten readings from John's gospel.

Bishop Michael Curry, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the USA said in a sermon recently "John is a crafty writer and wily with words; he lays down clues like breadcrumbs in the Hansel and Gretel story, helping us find our way home."¹

We get to follow the trail, and every time we come back to these passages we find something new or different.

The stories get interwoven with our own story and take us nearer to the cross and beyond to the empty tomb.

As the after church group noted last week, today's story about Lazarus has parallels with the resurrection story.

There is a tomb; the women are there. Mary weeps and so does Jesus in this episode. Which Mary is this, they wondered? New research suggests she might be Mary Magdalene² - would love to

¹ Sermon at the Funeral of Bishop Griswold
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3eFTWpsaRY>

² <https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/mary-the-tower>

spend the whole sermon telling you why but I can give you the reference if you are interested.

There is talk of resurrection. We are pointed towards Easter Day.

Before we get to Easter day we will journey from Palm Sunday through Good Friday. By Friday, the church will be empty and stark.

On Holy Saturday we will come and the church will be dark, like the tomb. Think of the Lazarus story,

Outside we will light our Paschal Candle which we will carry into the church. We will pass the light from one to another. Think of the healing of the man born blind.

Then we will witness a baptism. Think of the Samaritan woman at the well. We will pour living water on our candidate who we pray will experience new life and new beginnings. Think Nicodemus.

All of these stories will be found in that service like breadcrumbs left for us to follow. Images, metaphors and all our senses alert to see, hear, feel and taste them.

Each story also conjures up the memory of a former story and encourages the telling of a new one.

So today the raising of Lazarus conjures up the prophet Ezekiel seeing a vision of Israel as dry bones into which the prophet breathes the life of Yahweh, the God of life. In telling the Lazarus story we come with that story in mind.

Then we hear of the very personal encounter of Mary and Martha with their friend Jesus, we hear of Jesus' tears, his grief and sorrow.

Then on another level we hear Jesus' great sweeping statements about God's glory, about resurrection, about him being the Messiah.

And the two – the personal or the human and the glorious or divine meet as he speaks to his friend Lazarus and commands him to come out of the tomb.

The point here for us is not did this really happen this way? but how does this story connect with ours. What new story do we tell as we allow this one to resonate within us. Perhaps a story of grief and tears, of a death, of a loss.

And intertwined with that a story of new life, new possibilities which can come from a loss, or a new life born as another passes away. Or the ability to face a loss, because of Jesus' promise of new life, even if we can't see it yet.

The difference between Ezekiel and John is that the dry bones story is a story of promise for the future. The John – Lazarus story is a story of promise fulfilled here and now, the reality of life breaking in on death, on a day in Bethany in first century Palestine. But we treat it like the Ezekiel story, a story of promise for the future, or like a strange tale of a strange past.

So what can we do with this story – how can we bring it to bear on our lives?

When Martha says “yes, Lord I believe that you are the Messiah” she is not making an individual faith statement, she is saying I see you are the one promised of old, the one we have waited for, for generations, the one coming not to me, but to the world to show us a new way of being.

She is seeing the reality of Jesus in relationship with God and in relationship with us, the relationship which is the foundation of our community. There is nothing individual about calling Jesus the Messiah.

Later on in the Easter season we will be presenting 5 young people to our bishop for confirmation.

While they have some promises to make as individuals they very much take this step as members of our community. They don't proclaim their faith alone, we commit to walk with them. And so we surround them with support and prayer.

They have all been working hard on their preparation since January and we have some more work to do.

On April 29, the day before the confirmation we will have a retreat day here in the church, not just for them but for all of us to prepare for this new affirmation of faith in our midst.

The reading that day will be more John – the good shepherd this time who cares for every one of the sheep. More clues and breadcrumbs for us to find our way home.

Today we have the AGM of our parish; the reports, the finances and our conversation are all about being good stewards of our community in which our faith can be nourished.

What are our priorities, who will be our lay leaders for the next year?

As we meet we don't put aside the images of this Lent, we take them with us: Spirit, water, living water, sight/insight, death and life.

Nicodemus searching by night;

the unnamed woman at the well drinking water by day;

the man born with blindness being the only one who can see;

Jesus weeping with Mary and Martha at the tomb.

Follow these clues left for us by John, and we will find our way home.