

Live Again!

Raising of Lazarus

John chapter 11 and Ezekiel 37:1-14

In Ezekiel 37, the vision of the dry bones, the prophet begins to speak God's words. Something impossible begins to happen. Death begins to show signs of life.

The lives of people long dead begin to show signs of life.

God is restoring people, bringing hope to the hopeless. Life to the lifeless. Resurrecting the dead.

Likewise in the account of the raising of Lazarus. Jesus speaks life into a four day dead body.

For every person who has ever been threatened or overwhelmed by the ugliness of worry, anxiety, anger, fear, denial, guilt or shame, God says,

I am going to speak hope and life right back into you.

The cable television series "The Walking Dead" is a story about the survivors of a Zombie apocalypse.

As the story unfolds one begins to realise that it is not the zombies, but the survivors, who are the walking dead.

Hope for them seems lost. They appear to be doomed to join the ranks of the undead in the not too distant future.

As the story unfolds over several years they are saved again and again by a policeman named Rick who becomes a type of Saviour for them.

If you will, this story is a type –albeit rather fanciful – of our own lives in this fallen world.

The account of Ezekiel's vision and the raising of Lazarus are a type of our lives too.

They are also a sign of what our Saviour Jesus has done for we who have been among the ranks of the dead.

Dried out bones and stinking corpses that was us at one time.

Not a pretty image I know, but it describes every one of us who were at one time outside of Christ.

We were the dry bones of those who had gone into captivity under sin and death, just like those who went into captivity in distant Babylon for rejecting the God who loved them.

You cannot get anymore dead than bleached bones. That's us without Jesus.

But that's not the end of the story though. We have a wonderful God. A God of the impossible.

Ezekiel reminds us that we had become dried out bones, all hope was gone. But into that impossible scene steps the Lord.

He says to each one of us, "I will put life into you and restore you.

We were dead Lazarus, already rotting. The world had given up on us. Death had hidden us in its tomb out of the sight of the living.

But Jesus came into our darkness – he who is the Lord of Life. The Resurrection. The Truth. The Way to the Father. He says to those near him, “Roll the stone away.

In Ezekiel's vision God breathes life into slain bodies. Likewise, Jesus speaks words of life.

Did you catch what Jesus said?

Roll the stone away. Lazarus! Live!

There would be a time when another stone would be rolled away. Jesus would come out of that three day tomb and offer life to us.

And life is the offer my friends. Life from the one who not only has life but is Life.

Actually the Lazarus event points as a sign, to the power of Jesus death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave.

It is a sign that shows us what God has done for us. People dead in sin. So dead that each bleached and rotting corpse stinks. We rise again, made alive in Jesus.

We were like the grotesque figures of the undead. Walking Corpses with the appearance of being alive.

And yet even in that state God loved us so much that his Son was willing to give his life for us. Amazing.

And that deadness makes the Son of God weep. It makes him angry at the entrance to Lazarus's tomb.

He is not angry at the disciples. He is not angry at Mary and Martha. He is not even angry at Lazarus.

He is angry at what evil has done to his people, and in just a few days on from this event he will do something that forever turns the tide.

Death will give way to Life. Error will yield to Truth. Light will blot out the darkness.

Jesus will die and in his dying we will die to the power of sin.

Jesus will rise, and in his rising we will rise to eternal life.

Now! Why does Jesus delay when he receives the message that Lazarus is gravely ill?

In actual fact by that time Lazarus is already dead. Let me explain.

Jesus was a day's journey from Lazarus' home.

The messengers took one day to get to Jesus and a day to return.

Jesus remains a full two more days – why? – So God's glory can be revealed.

Then he sets out for Bethany – a further day's journey

That's four days.

How many days did Mary and Martha say that Lazarus had been dead?

That's right – four days.

Lazarus must have died not long after the messengers set out to take word to Jesus. Perhaps only a few hours afterward.

Sometimes we cannot see what God has planned for us. Sometimes it even seems like God is not in control, or worse, that he doesn't care.

That's what the sisters were thinking. Why Lord?

Haven't we all said that from time to time?

Now go back to when the messengers finally found Jesus. What does Jesus say to the disciples?

"Lazarus' sickness will not end in his death." He knew that Lazarus had already died didn't he? Just like he knows your circumstances. Friends, God is always in control.

And so Jesus words came true. Jesus stepped up to that grave and shouted, "Lazarus come forth!"

And the man who was dead came out alive.

That's you and me. God comes to us in His word and the water of baptism and in the bread and the wine of the Eucharist.

He says to us, "Come out and live!"

And we do! Can you give me an Amen!

It surely deserves one. And a Hallelujah.

What happened to Lazarus after he was resurrected I wonder? Have you ever given thought to that?

The chief priests plotted to kill Lazarus and put him back in the tomb for good.

But that's where we lose track of this dead man walking.

Truth is that we don't know exactly what Lazarus was like after he emerged from his tomb.

Christian tradition goes a couple of different directions when it comes to the rest of the story.

One tradition says that Lazarus, learning of the plot against him, fled to France where he became bishop of Marseilles and was later martyred.

Another says that he and his sisters fled to Larnaca on the island of Cyprus.

There he was eventually ordained by Paul and Barnabas and served for years as bishop.

He served as a living example of the Christian life and hope of the resurrection.

Some suggest He died (again) at age 60 and was buried in a sarcophagus with the inscription.

“The four-day Lazarus — friend of Christ.”

His remains, so it is believed, were removed to Constantinople in the year 890 by the Byzantine emperor who built a church in Larnaca that survives to this day.

Whatever happened, we might well imagine that Lazarus spent the rest of his second life devoted to telling others about the Christ.

Not just how Jesus raised him physically from the dead but how Jesus had given him real life.

A life of meaning and purpose.

Read the promises recorded in Ezekiel 37:12-14

Let them breathe new life into you again this week.

*This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I will open your graves of exile and cause you to rise again. Then I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 When this happens, O my people, you will know that I am the Lord. 14 I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live again and return home to your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done what I said. Yes, the Lord has spoken!”*