

“The Teacher is Here and Is Calling for You”

John 11:1-45

Fifth Sunday in Lent

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.

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.” ¹³~~Jesus, 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.

The Sermon

God’s love in Jesus Christ is all over the Gospel according to John; all over the New Testament; all over the teachings of the Church covering two millennia and counting.

The question John invites us to consider this morning is: to what extent does God’s love in Christ apply to you?

If any of “this”—the Christian faith, belief and practice that we observe and celebrate and commit ourselves to—if any of this is true it is, then it is the most important thing in the world.

It doesn't just take so-so days and make them a little more bearable, although it does have the power to do that.

It takes valleys of dead, dried bones, and puts them back together, and adds sinews and flesh, and breathes life into them.

Every single one of us has failures, shame, loss, grief, secrets only God knows about; physical pain, emotional scars, mental anguish, spiritual deadness.

How far into the tomb can God reach for you? In other words: To what extent does God's love in Christ apply to you?

The first of his signs was when he made water into wine at a wedding at Cana.

No one was expecting it. He didn't even seem to be expecting it. But when the wine ran out, his mother turned to him and said words to the effect of, "All right, it's time for you to do what you know you can do."

And he said words to the effect of, "Not now, Mom. It's not time yet."

But Mom always knows best. So regardless of whether or not he was the savior of the world, "True God from True God, begotten, not made," he was still her son. And so while he was being all transcendent—"my hour has not yet come"—she was ignoring him, and telling the wine stewards, "do whatever he tells you to do."

And so, without further comment, Jesus told them to fill the stone water jars with water. They filled each of the six all the way up—twenty to thirty gallons each—and Jesus said, "draw some out and take it to the chief steward." And when the chief wine steward tasted it he said to the bridegroom, "Most people serve the good stuff first, and then when everybody's had so much they can't tell the difference any more, they put out the inferior stuff. But you have saved the good wine until now."

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

So you could say he started out, not as the life of the party, but saving the life of the party.

Later he was in Cana again, and there was a royal official whose son lay dying in Capernaum. The official went and begged Jesus to come down and heal his son. And Jesus said, “Go. Your son will live.”

As the official was going back home, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. He asked what time it was when the son had begun to recover, and they said, “Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.” The father realized that was exactly when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.”

From now on, death itself was on notice: the Lord of Life is loose in the world, and has come to destroy you. Of course, no one could know that that was what Jesus would do, nor would they know that in order to defeat death for all of us, he would make the ultimate sacrifice himself.

From turning water into wine as the first of his signs, Jesus healed an official’s son. From there, he went to Jerusalem where there was a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, and in the porticoes around the pool lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. Jesus said to him, “Do you want to be made well?”

The sick man said, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” (They believed the water was stirred by the touch of an invisible, healing angel, but only those who got to the water first could be healed by it.)

Jesus ignored the water and just said, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” Immediately the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Now his sign had gone from healing a young man who had been sick for a short time to healing a man who had been living with paralysis and hopelessness for almost 40 years.

How far does God’s love in Christ apply to you?

Later, near Passover, when Jesus saw a large crowd coming toward him because they’d heard about all the cures that he was bringing, he said to his disciple Philip, “Where are we going to buy bread for these people to eat?”

Philip said, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” Another disciple, Andrew, said, “There’s a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?”

Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” So they sat down, about five thousand families in all. And Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.

Now he had made miraculous wine and miraculous bread, and had fed thousands.

Early one morning, he came to the temple in Jerusalem. All the people came to him, and he sat down—which was the traditional signal that the rabbi was about to teach—and he began to teach them.

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”

He acted like he was distracted by something else—he was writing something with his finger in the sand—and after they kept on questioning him, he finally straightened up and said to them, “Whichever one of you who is without sin, go ahead and be the first to throw a stone at her.”

One by one, they went away, and finally Jesus was left alone with the woman. And he said, “Where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

Just like he had told Nicodemus at the beginning of his long journey, Jesus came not to condemn the world, but to save it. He has even come to save those who are falsely accused and those who are rightly accused. He has come not to condemn, but to save.

To what extent does God’s love in Christ apply to you?

He saw a man who had blind from birth. He spat on the ground and made mud and spread the mud on the man's eyes, and said, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." The man went, and washed, and came back able to see.

Throughout the journey of Jesus' ministry, he has performed signs, but not just to be magic tricks. A magic trick is just a demonstration for its own sake. A sign is something that points beyond itself to a more fundamental reality. And the signs Jesus was doing fed the hungry, gave sight to the blind, healed the lame, restored health to the sick, and brought forgiveness and hope to those who live with guilt and shame and fear.

And then he came to Bethany.

Lazarus had been dead for four days—long enough that Martha warned Jesus, in the immortal words of the King James Version, "Lord, by this time, he stinketh."

And when Jesus raised Lazarus, we learned that God's will for our life reaches even beyond death. In him, it is never too late, and we are never lost. And nothing in life or in death can separate us from God's love.

Does God's love in Christ apply to you?

He had gone from giving life to a party to giving life to a dead man. What more could he possibly do, to show us all how deeply and how perfectly God loves us, and the extent to which God will go to secure our abundant, eternal life?

What more could he possibly do? What more would he have to do? He will sit for one last meal with his disciples. And then he will do it.

When Jesus came near the village, Lazarus's sister Martha came out to meet Jesus. They talked. She told him that she believed. And then she went back to the house and said to her sister, Mary,

and to you, and to me:

"The Teacher is here and is calling for you."

What do you imagine he wants with you?

Or, said another way: to what extent does God's love in Christ apply to you?

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April 2, 2017