

Mother Susan's Sermon for 3 29 20

Well, our reading from Ezekiel is really appropriate for these days, isn't it? We can certainly understand the cry, "Our bones are dried up! And our hope is lost! **We are cut off completely!**" It's feeling a little parched out there these days, isn't it, my friends? And I'm sure many of us are feeling cut off. But we're not. God's response is, "I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live!" That is God's promise to us in times like these. However scary it gets, we can trust that God walks beside us and buoys us up with hope. He offers us his Spirit. "I will put my spirit within you!"

We can fill ourselves with the promises of the Holy Spirit to settle our minds, focussing on the Holy Spirit. As Paul reminds us, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God lives within us, if only we recognize it. Whatever happens to us, the Spirit is life and living within us. God, who raised Christ from the dead (and we will celebrate that in a couple of weeks!) will give us life through the the "indwelling" of the Holy Spirit.

And then, this week we have the wonderful story of Lazarus. You know, it's funny. We hear of Lazarus. But we never hear from him, we never hear him speak. He is here, his story is here to glorify God, to serve God's purposes. I wonder what he was like. I wonder if he knew that the whole reason for his life and death was to glorify Jesus. I wonder what the rest of his life was like. Hopefully blessedly ordinary!

His sisters must have wondered, if they believed that they were so close to Jesus, they must have wondered why Jesus took so long to get to them. They had told Jesus that their brother was ill in plenty of time. Was it painful to know that one of their brother's best friends was capable of healing him, but just didn't seem to be able to make it to him in time?

But Jesus knew what he was doing. He knew what was going to happen and he knew it *needed to happen* - the totally unbelievable! **Was it? Is it?** Jesus knew this act, this miracle would set a target on him. He knew the pharisees and all those who were afraid of Rome and the political leaders of Israel, would set out to destroy him after news of this miracle got out. He was just too troublesome. For so many reasons, Jesus couldn't be allowed to live. Even Thomas, (remember him? the doubter?) knew that once Jesus publicly brought someone back from the dead, he would be marked for death himself. Yet Thomas said he was willing to die with him. However they perceived it, all of his beloved followers were walking towards Golgotha, sooner or later.

And yet Martha, she understood, she understood that Jesus was basically about life, that he was the Messiah, come into the world to bring life.

And so we come to a scene that is almost humorous. In the midst of all this sorrow, in this time of recriminations, "if only you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died," Martha, ever the practical, comes up with stark reality. When Jesus tells them to roll away the stone, Martha says, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." (In the King James version, she plainly tells Jesus, "He stinketh." !!!)

And then we hear a bystander comment, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" And you can almost hear the people around them saying, "Yeah. Couldn't he have done something?" And Jesus knows the time has come for the glory of God and resurrection. Lazarus' story is nothing short of a resurrection, a preview of what is to come.

And yet, for those of us who consider ourselves modern, for those of us who pride ourselves on our intellectual capabilities — this story is a profound challenge.

Have you ever been embarrassed to be a Christian, embarrassed to be a person of faith?

So often scholars, anyone who considers themselves intellectual or educated, scoff at people of faith. Too often they shame us into silence. Yet, it's all about faith. Everything important is about faith.

Do you believe your husband or wife loves you? Can you PROVE it? It's all about faith. The love of our children, our families - it's all about faith.

Believe me, there **are** intellectuals, there are scholars who *know* in their hearts, in their bones, who have faith that faith isn't just about believing in something that isn't true or real. As one Christian scholar put it... "Your faith doesn't have to hang by an intellectual thread." In other words, **you can have a brain and be a Christian**. We need to remind ourselves of what faith is and realize that we live with it every day. We use faith. We need faith. *And we need to exercise our faith, just like a muscle, all the time*. No more dry bones! No! We have bones with marrow and flesh and sinew. Come forth? We can all come forth! That is the promise.

Lazarus rose from the dead. Jesus rose from the dead. Some day, we shall rise too! AMEN.