

Fifth Sunday in Lent – March 29, 2020, Year A

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 11:18-44

“Hope Eternal”

As I was awakened early this morning there were a lot of things racing through my head. One of the things was that I was not even planning to talk about the reading from Ezekiel. And it was clear, and God put it on my heart – that there is a lot of hope in that reading. You might say – how can you have hope from dry bones? Well, yes, the dry bones that we can look at during this COVID-19 are the closed down churches – and the people who are not allowed to meet in person, and mingle with one another – There is no touching, no reaching, no hugging, there is no kissing. God has given us a means of hope and He has breathed new life, ruach – spirit in each of us – that we can meet in these electronic ways – praying together – seeking His mercy, His grace. His healing and His love. While we are not Ezekiel in the valley – we are living in a completely different set of circumstances, and a different valley – but one in which we can draw strength and hope from the Lord.

And then there is our Gospel reading. This Gospel reading is so strong in faith and love. Both Martha and later Mary were upset that Jesus did not come right away and prevent their brother's death. Jesus understood their grief and He felt compassion for them, just as He feels compassion for those who are suffering right now, and those who are filled with worry and fear. Holy Scripture tells us that Jesus loved Lazarus, just like He loved Martha and Mary. It also says in Isaiah that our Savior would be a man of sorrows – acquainted with grief. Jesus felt their pain and He experienced it right along with them. Jesus allowed their grief – just as He allows yours and mine. Jesus did more than just give them permission to grieve – Jesus offered them something that no one else could give – or nothing else can offer. Jesus offers hope.

Verse 35 of John chapter 11 is the shortest verse in all of the Bible – “*Jesus wept.*” Why did Jesus weep? Some say, ‘He was saddened because His friend died.’ No – I don't think so. Jesus knew exactly what He was about to do – in just moments. Jesus was about to call Lazarus out of the grave. Jesus weeps for those people in their grief – just as He weeps with each one of us.

Jesus said that Lazarus would rise again, and that Jesus, Himself would be the means of that resurrection. Please listen again to these words of Jesus - “*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*” Whenever I hear Jesus say “*I Am*” my mind goes right back to the third chapter of Exodus when Moses, who had taken off his sandals in order to speak to the burning bush, asks who shall I say is sending me? “*God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'*” (Exodus 3:14) Seven times in the Gospel of John Jesus reveals His identity and this is one of them: “*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*”

Just a few minutes later, after Jesus proclaimed His identity and the promise of resurrection through Him, Jesus would demonstrate that very fact in the life of Lazarus. Jesus was saying that He is the door to life, both a full and abundant life on earth and when we leave this earth,

an even more wonderful and abundant life in heaven. And when we place our faith in Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross at Calvary, then we have the hope He offers to all who will take it. That hope is available to everyone. *“For God so loved the world”* – not just Douglas, GA or Pearson, or Atkinson County, or Merrick, NY or Mineola NY, or wherever it might be – that hope is available to everyone!

Jesus called out in a loud voice *“Lazarus come out!”* The one who spoke everything into existence at creation had just restored life to Lazarus.

My friends, Jesus feels our grief and stands right alongside us when we hurt. There is many of us who are hurting right now. Hope is not found in the good life we try to live. Jesus says that our hope for eternity doesn't lie within us or anything we want or that we do, but in Him alone – and what He has done. That is what He means when He says that *“He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”*

I would ask each one of you today to place your hope in Jesus Christ. For Him to help you in this life; in the midst of this crazy pandemic; place your hope in Him for life everlasting, and place your hope in Him in anticipation of the resurrection, of healing and of mercy. Jesus is with you and standing with you during this time of being a shut in. I want you to take comfort in the words of the risen Jesus on a mountain in Galilee, recorded in Matthew 28:20, *“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* He means that to you today as well. Take comfort in that .