

## Reflections on the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, 2014

Readings: Ezekiel 37:12-14 *I will open your graves and have you rise from them*

Psalm 130 "With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption"

Romans 8:8-11 *The Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you.*

John 11:1-45 *I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord; whoever believes in me will have eternal life.*

♪ To Life, to life, L'chai-im! L'chai-im, L'chai-im to life!

Life has a way of confusing us, blessing and bruising us,

Drink L'chai-im To Life, to Life, l'chai-im! L'chai-im! L'chai-im, L'chai-im to life!

A gift we seldom are wise enough ever to prize enough,

Drink L'chai-im ..... To Life! ♪

The story of Lazarus is about the central message of Christ:

"I have come that you might have life, and have it to the full." [John 10:10]

It is about the kind of life that begins before we die, and is not ended with death.

In a way every change is a kind of death - whether it is a change in health, like when Lazarus got sick, or a loss of a job or even the birth of a child. What has died is what we were before the change, yet there is always hope that a new life can begin after the change.

But sometimes I'm like Monk, in the TV series, when he says, "I don't mind change, I just don't want to be there when it happens." I suspect the apostles were like that too. How about you?

The story of Lazarus is important whether we face our own death, or the death of someone we love - as Martha and Mary did. It has something to teach us whenever we face illness, as Lazarus did, or any change. You know, after he was called out of his cave, Lazarus still had to face change. He did it by choosing to live as a disciple of Jesus - and put his own life at risk, because this event set the plot to kill Jesus in motion, and that plan included killing Lazarus as well.

I remember the time I got a call from a close friend. Her son, Bjorn, had been killed in a car accident at the age of 16. I got to their home in Canandaigua as soon as I could, and grieved with the family, and the many teen aged friends of the young man who had died. When the memorial service was held, the church was packed. The Scriptures that promised resurrection and eternal life were read, of course, but I was moved to tell a story about how even creation proclaims the promise the Christ still offers.

### **The Story of how a water bug becomes a dragonfly**

Once upon a time there was a pond. A little colony of water bugs lived on the bottom, scrabbling about in the mud. They were ugly little creatures, but they were happy & very busy in their little community.

However, every once in a while one of them would disappear and was seen no more. Puzzled by this occurrence, the leader of the community gathered them all and told them that the next one to leave had to promise to come back and explain what had happened. They all agreed.

One day, it was this very leader that had the undeniable urge to climb the stalk of a lily pad. On reaching the top, the little water bug fell over, asleep. When the leader awoke - everything was different - the water bug had become a **dragonfly** - with 4 silver wings that made it possible to fly above the water. Looking down, the dragonfly saw the community of water bugs and remembered the promise they had all made.

But it was no longer possible to go back under the water. So the dragonfly mused, "I guess they are going to have to discover for themselves what they are meant to become. Besides, I can no longer breathe under water, and they probably would not even recognize me in this beautiful new body of mine."

So the newborn dragonfly soared off happily into a new world of sun & air & sky.

For weeks after the service, the story gave life to Bjorn's family and friends. His sister began to make dragonfly jewelry. His girl friend had a dragonfly tattooed on her ankle. And everything in the local stores that had anything to do with dragonflies was sold out!

When I remember that event and reflect on the death of my own mother in December 2009, I remember the pain of loss, but I also hear the deep truth of the teaching of Jesus, that even Death is a form of healing. My mother moved from a place of partial dementia and confinement to a wheelchair to a place of peace and life. She believed the words of St. Paul in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, "If the spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit dwelling in you." The way she would say it to me was, "I'm not afraid of *death*, it is the process of dying I don't like."

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From God's point of view - and according to what we say we believe - when we say "I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting." Lazarus is living proof of the truth of the prophesy of Ezekiel in the 1<sup>st</sup> reading, "I will open your graves and have you rise from them."

But, for Lazarus, It was **NOT** enough to take the stone away and call him out of the tomb

Jesus **also** told them to, "**Untie him, and let him go free.**"

It is not enough to 'come out of the tomb' at our Baptism to begin to share the New Risen Life of Jesus  
if we are still 'bound up' like Lazarus was

It is **ALSO** a reminder to all of us to look closely at those things we are

**wrapped up in** – those things we are **wrapped up in** that strengthen us - make us strong & encourage us

– those things we are **wrapped up in** that bind us and keep us from being Free

~ Free to **LOVE** & Free to **BE LOVED**

~ Free to **BE HEALED** & Free to **HEAL**

This Gospel story reminds us that all of the disciples of Jesus need TWO things

**Discernment** – to discover **both** my *strengths* that enable me to follow JESUS to love & live as He did – and my **weaknesses** that keep me from living my Baptismal Call. And

**Encouragement & Help** – to be able to **become & stay** Free .

What are you **involved in** that brings you to **Christ** or **Christ** to you?

What are you **wrapped up in** that keeps you from living fully the NEW Risen Life you received at your BAPTISM

– your 'calling forth' from the tomb – your 'unwrapping' from those things that bind you and prevent you from 'being free'?

The word of *God* today calls us to untie each other and set each other free,  
as Lazarus was in today's *Gospel*.

The EUCHARIST today gives us the pattern and the power to use *God's* gift of life and freedom:  
to repent, to rise and to serve.

To KNEEL with *Mary of Bethany*, admitting our need to be healed and forgiven.

To STAND with *Lazarus*, receiving the power to live the life of the Spirit

To WALK with *Martha*, to meet *Jesus* in communion

and to go out to serve the Lord in our families and our world.

The Eucharist we celebrate gives us the vision to see death and change as forms of healing, and  
the power to receive and pass on the life that is stronger than death itself.

♪ "And he will raise you up on eagles' wings, bear you on the breath of dawn,  
Make you to shine like the sun and hold you in the palm of his hand." ♪