

Breathe on us, breath of God and fill us with new life as we reflect on your word. Amen

All of this morning's scriptures deal with issues of life and death. In **Ezekiel**, there is the wonderful image of the reanimation of the dried bones of the people of Israel by the Spirit's breath and the prophet's word. In the **Psalms** someone faithful and intently waits for the Lord's salvation even in the depths of depression. In the passage from **Romans**, St. Paul explains the choices that lead us to death or to life. And the gospel reading from **John**, tells of Jesus raising his good friend Lazarus from the decay of the tomb to renewed life. All of these readings point to how God interacts with us in saving ways; to how God desires to give us abundant life.

Let's focus for a few minutes on the gospel. It is one of the miracle or sign stories from John; the culmination of many stories that tell of Jesus' power. This time, it is power over the ultimate enemy, which is death. The Lazarus story is powerful and disturbing and mysterious and in some ways it speaks for itself. So I will just offer one thing that really stood out for me this week as I worked with this passage. This insight came to me through the musings of D. Mark Davis at the blog [Left Behind and Loving It](#). It's a pretty simple insight – that Jesus is offering resurrection and new life NOW. He's calling us to receive that new life NOW. And that is a challenging offer because NOW is a place most of us find difficult to truly inhabit. Let me explain by looking at the exchange between Jesus and Lazarus' sister, Martha. Jesus is late on the scene. Lazarus has been dead four days. Martha says, "**Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.**" We hear regret here surely, denial maybe, and a hint of accusation, something like "*Why are you so late?*" But we also hear a very familiar tendency we have when we are grieving; the tendency to regret the past. Grieving is a time of "*if only I had*", "*why didn't I?*" and "*oh, for just one more day.*" We think of things we said or didn't say, things we would take back or gladly put out there for our loved one to hear. When we express those regrets, it's really a sign that we have loved. Things haven't been perfect but our hearts have been engaged. Rather than beating ourselves up over our regrets, we're better off to acknowledge them and befriend them and know that they are the cost when imperfect people love in an imperfect world. That is a way of accepting that our present lives are time-bound – we live forward only – we cannot go back

and change what has been. Of course, that is easier said than done. Oftentimes, the past is right where we get stuck! We are like poor Martha with her *"Lord, if you have been here"* – living in the past.

Jesus' response to Martha is, **"Your brother will rise again."** She hears this and in her head goes straight to what she has been taught. She gives Jesus back what we might call a Confirmation Class or textbook sort of answer. **"I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."** What I hear in that response is Martha accepting the idea that resurrection is some abstract thing that will happen someday but so far in the future that it really makes no difference to the pain she is experiencing at that moment. That's often how we think of resurrection, isn't it? We say, *"Yeah, sure, I believe in the resurrection of the dead."* And we go on living as if that far away someday is the only kind of resurrection we understand. We are like poor Martha again with her *"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day"* - living in some distant future.

So what struck me about this gospel is that Jesus is not talking about living in a past full of regrets or in an abstract future that has no bearing on the NOW. He's trying to get through to Martha with the reality of his love and his presence right with her. He is trying to touch her and change her life with his possibilities for her NOW. Imagine the scene this way. Martha looks behind with regret. At the same time she looks forward with some idea of hope. And the temptation is there for her to live either back there or up ahead. But not here, where it hurts so much. Then Jesus touches her face and looks into her eyes and says, **"I am the resurrection and the life."** I am - here and now - I am your resurrection and your life. He's telling Martha (and us) that he is more than enough to keep us in the NOW. With Jesus we can live not by our regrets of the past or by our fears and/or hopes of the future. We can live in this moment; this holy moment which God gives to us. This holy moment in which God calls us to be God's love in the things we say, and are, and do. And this moment is all that really counts, all that really matters. And Jesus is here in it with us, raising up to new life. Perhaps that is the clearest way we can know what it means to say that in Christ, **"the word became flesh and dwelt among us."** So we ask ourselves, what does it look like for me to live in the NOW with Jesus as my resurrection and my life?

This gospel ends with Jesus inviting those around the newly risen Lazarus, to **“Unbind him and let him go.”** I love that Jesus involves the community in bringing to completion Lazarus’ freeing and his abundant life. It seems we are all meant to be in this journey of faith together – helping one another to find that abundant life that Jesus is – to accept the regrets of the past *and* to look with hope to the future – but firstly and most powerfully to live in the NOW together, reminding each other that the One who is Resurrection and Life is present in our midst. May we know it is so amongst us.

Amen