

Bible Study
Fifth Sunday in Lent, Year A
April 2, 2017

[RCL] Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

Ezekiel 37:1-14

In this passage from Ezekiel the use of imagery of bodily resurrection explains the genesis of God's reconciliatory process for the restoration of the exiled community. The prophet echoes the creation imagery in the narrative, the re-ordering of life as evident in the wordplay - Hebrew "ruah" for breath or wind - which in this context designates both physical and spiritual revival, thus offers hope and healing to the people of God.

The allusion to the four winds (God's spirit) is a demonstration of God's cosmic intervention in the history of Israel's salvation process. The Prophet's frequent reference to "Yahweh" "I AM the Lord"(vs 13), portrays an assurance of God's imminent salvation. God will surely restore his people to their land and bring them hope in the place of despair.

As the community of God, our spiritual life and hope may have been thwarted by the negative daily life encounters and personal and corporate sins - indicators of spiritual exile. These may include: social-economic, political, and religious reforms of our time which may have dashed hope from many. God's love promises hope in his son Jesus Christ, through whom by faith all humanity is reconciled to God and to one another, thereby achieving holistic restoration.

- How is the contemporary church called to renew the life of its members?
- What is God's plan in the restoration of the lost relation with humanity?
- The metaphorical use of dry bones in the passage refers to a state of loss of hope. In what areas, do Christians find their spirituality drained and needs rejuvenation?

Psalm 130

As the Psalmist makes his plea to God for his iniquities, he portrays God as too distant to redeem mankind, and yet his long-suffering and patience with humanity says so much about his immanent and forgiving nature. Humanity is vulnerable to sin, a situation which seeks a sincere and repentant spirit/soul. God is inherently loving and forgiving, hence Israel must depend entirely on this redeeming grace and not lose hope.

The Psalmist is calling the Christian church to a genuine vertical and horizontal reconciliation in which sincere wholeness is found. Sin breaches relationships in families, communities, races, religion, and nations. Human nature may lead to vices like hate, mistrust and revenge, whereas a person with a repentant heart forgives as he/she is forgiven. Christians are called to hope only in God as the origin of our life.

- What benefits are in store for the church and its members from practicing a penitential life?
- In what ways, can we harness God's attributes of love and forgiveness in building the Christian families and our nation?

Romans 8:6-11

Throughout the narrative, Paul endeavors to elucidate the dualistic nature of the development and application of God's law. The law of the flesh is mechanical and imprisoning and is associated with the old human nature. Hence it leads to death. The new law of the Spirit, which is achieved by faith in Jesus Christ, leads to human freedom and grants life.

According to Paul, an ambivalence created by the contrasting dominion of the law of the flesh and that of the Spirit is broken by the act of adoption by the life-giving spirit, which sets the new order of creation in Christ. The Spirit therefore legitimizes our inheritance as God's children, who have access to all the benefits of God's children, including eternal life.

Men and women are here awakened to the acknowledgment of God's work of salvation which has been perfected by the death and resurrection of Christ. By the spirit of God, our faith in Christ becomes the means of immortality.

Through God's Spirit, everyone's aspirations find freedom from the constant intra-personal and inter-personal struggles. For God's children, the Spirit replaces sin as the indwelling power which determines a person's life and behavior.

- Paul tries to explain how the law of the Spirit works to ultimately free us from the struggles of human nature (the law of the flesh). How does this help your understanding of role of the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant?
- In your view, how would the law of the flesh lead to death?
- When Paul says "for all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God" (v.14), how does this statement inform our choice for freedom from the bondage of sin?

John 11:1-45

The narrative of John gives an explicit illustration of the climax of Christ's reign on earth, being the giver of life and the light of the world. The resurrection of Lazarus from the dead forms the central part in the narrative and is an affirmation of Christ's divine role of his life-giving ministry on earth. His impending death and resurrection suggested by the plot to arrest him points to the unveiling of God's glory. According to Jesus, our choice to believe in his name supersedes other choices in this earthly life.

The human Lord here makes a perfect companion, whose love breaks all bonds, reaching deep into our sufferings, groaning, loneliness and ultimately forgives our sins. Just as many people made the choice to believe in Christ upon witnessing his great works, it is possible today that men and women by the power of the Holy Spirit have equal opportunities of experiencing Christ's love. Christ, as the friend of sinners, is concerned with our outpouring response in faith, upon which he meets us in our diversity and weakness.

- Lent is a time of self-reflection and repentance through prayers, fasting, and self-denial. As the church focuses on Christ's Passion and the revealed glory in Resurrection. In what ways does the above narrative prepare us for the same?
- How is the contemporary church equipped to demonstrate God's love and compassion in our ailing families, community, and nation?

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