

Lent V Year A 2026

I know you grow weary of my saying it; but I shall say it again: The gospels are not history... the gospels are concerned with theology... So let's back up and look at the wider world behind this dramatic and famous story from John's Gospel, the raising of Lazarus... First of all, speaking of resurrection, we Christians speak of it only as it relates to Jesus.... Jesus the only one risen from the dead, because he is the son of God... and because of his resurrection, we too will rise after our deaths... But, according to scripture, Lazarus too was raised from the dead. And in the other gospels, when John the baptizer asks the disciples if Jesus is the real deal, the disciples tell John that they are witnesses to the lame walking, and the blind receiving their sight, and the dead being raised... Jesus also raises from the dead Jairus's daughter... and for that matter there are resurrection stories in the Old Testament as well...so this resurrection business is much bigger than Jesus alone... theology not history... and I would say more than theology... We are dealing with mythology here.... And you know, when I say mythology, I don't mean fantasy... I mean the deep imaginative grammar that speaks of who we are as humans in relationship with God... Mythology is the articulation of deep truth that resides in our collective consciousness... So in the passage we just read

we are hearing our story... Our true story borne by the wings of the imagination...

Is the story true? Absolutely.... more than we know.

Now many of you know that the resurrection motif is ubiquitous in the world's religions... stories of resurrection exist in just about every culture in the world, and they precede Christianity... In ancient Phoenicia on the coast of Palestine there were rites which involved throwing an effigy of their god into the sea, and raising the god to new life... in Greek mythology, the story of Prometheus, the fire-bringer, doomed to perpetual death in an eternity of torment for giving fire to mortals, only to be unbound and set free by Hercules... Aeneas descended into the realm of the dead, and returned to earth... resurrection is a motif in Hinduism in India and in Zoroastrianism in Persia. So this is the theological air that the New Testament scribes breathe... and what I'm saying is: that if we treat this as a fantastic miracle story of Jesus only; treating this as a supernatural event unique to the life of Jesus, then we miss the profound mythological import of what these writers are saying to us.

So let's look at this story within the thematic framework of John... You remember the Prologue in John... Jesus is of the light of God... The light of the creation, the light that has existed forever, before the beginning... John calls this

the light of truth, the Word, the Logos... the golden ratio as it were... the ground of our being... Logos, the truth of God's nature....and therefore, to know Jesus is to know God... and then the most stunning claim in this gospel is that humankind bears this light as well... Jesus is the light and the light is the light of humankind... so then, it follows that to know Jesus we come to know ourselves... So the life and ministry of Jesus is the life and ministry to which we are called.... As I am sent, so I send you, Jesus tells his disciples.... I say it like this: Jesus is the archetype of our true humanity. To follow in the way of Jesus is to follow our true path.

In his poetic masterpiece, *The Wasteland*, T.S. Eliot coined the term 'death in life'... recognizing that it is not our natural death that so daunts us.... But that living our natural lives dead to joy and creativity...living lives characterized by dread and fear and hopelessness... To Eliot that was our modern dilemma... Eliot writing between the first and second world wars, after the exuberance of the industrial revolution had faded, observed that there was a deathly, paralyzing anxiety that had descended on his society; PTSD we now call it... capitalism was not going to be the means of an egalitarian society; the gap between rich and poor was ever widening.... Violence had acquired an industrial efficiency... the world was not as it should be... and for Eliot this was a death far worse than our mere mortality.

Some things never change... that is the death of which the ancient scribes of our sacred lore speak, in both Hebrew scripture and the New Testament... They speak of a 'death in life' characterized by indignity and shame, poverty, illness, want, exclusion ... oppression and violence... They call it sin: the structures of our world that undermine and subvert our true humanity... Our physical deaths are natural... our living deaths are not... So the mandate of John's gospel is that we are sent as Jesus is sent... to raise the dead to life... that is what salvation means... to raise the dead, to lift people up from the bondage of sin.... We, brothers and sisters, are sent, as light, to call out of the tombs, the stench notwithstanding, the dead of our world.... To raise into well-being the ones who are denied their share of the abundance of this planet we inhabit... this world that is God's, not nations, but God's.... We speak as if our borders are sacred.... But there are no borders in God's world. Borders are an expression of the powerful wielding power over the powerless... God's world and its sustaining beauty are for all people... that is why ultimately this whole debate on immigration is absurd... people migrate only because they want to live a good and sustainable life, and as children of God that is their right.

The dead-in-life of our world are so many... so undone... the liberation theologians called them the non-persons... the non-persons!... They are the ones

who live in the stench of death, despite the fact that there is enough... along our capricious borders; in refugee camps, in the projects; in our prisons; in intractable poverty; in hospitals.... The recurring pandemics will weigh most heavily on the poor and the disenfranchised. They are trapped in the tombs of indignity and fear and violence.... And It is the premise of our mythology, the very practice of the Resurrection... from our capacity for empathy and compassion, modeled by our brother Jesus, and the many who follow him... It is our responsibility, our joy, to raise the dead into lives of dignity, lives free from hopelessness and fear.... And perhaps most importantly, resurrection is a participatory and collaborative practice. The issue is, in short, freedom... and the joy that freedom brings. Jesus calls us to unbind the dead, and set them free... Jesus calls us, as he was called, to give them a life worth living... and that would be quite a miracle enough... a miracle so very possible and present in the Mythical mind of God.

In the reading from Hebrew scripture appointed for this morning, Ezekiel's story of the dry bones... The prophet/protagonist asks the God of his people if the scattered bones of his dissolute nation can live; is life possible in the midst of death?... and God in God's wisdom tells him that that is for him to say... It is for you to say if these bones can live. That is, in short a statement of faith. It is our statement of faith... We may well ask the question concerning our foundering

nation upon the shoals of autocracy... Can this nation live?... Only we, God's people can answer the question... so consider well the possibility... consider the answer knowing that all things are possible in the imagination of God... Might the answer be a resounding yes?