

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank

you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

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I stepped out of my car in the parking lot of the Central Market feeling very disoriented. Going to the grocery store is something I used to do about three times a week. But for three weeks before this errand, I had been either away in Italy or sequestered in my house.

Jennifer and I took the self-quarantine very seriously, despite having no symptoms. We mostly just *really* did not want to pass anything along. And so, I never left the house except to get the mail across the street and then only when I was certain no one was around.

Three weeks later, there I was in a combination of the most mundane and yet unfamiliar situation wondering if this might be a minor version of the strangeness that Lazarus must have felt. I could suddenly imagine him stepping out into the light, still bandaged, blinking and wondering what would happen next.

In the early church and for centuries, this Sunday was the last time that the church gathered to instruct those who were to be baptized at the Great Pascha Vigil. And so, these readings address the gift that would come to them in that ritual sacrament.

There is a reference in the reading from Ezekiel that also shows up in St. Paul’s letter to the church in Rome. YHWH says to the children of Israel through the prophet, “I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live...” The word *ruach* in Hebrew means both spirit and breath.

St. Paul reminds the Gentile and Jewish Christians in Rome that “...you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you.” And the Greek word that Paul used, *pneuma*, serves the same double meaning: spirit and breath.

YHWH is asking the prophet to “inspire,” to breathe the breath of Adonai, the living God, into a field of dead, dry bones. And they will be given not simply animation, but the life of the Holy One. In his letter, Paul is reminding other children of God that this same spirit was breathed into them at their baptisms.

In the act of creating people YHWH breathes life, God's very own spirit, into earthly matter. We get the story from the book of Genesis of the *adama*, the "mud-creature" or "earthling" that God creates. And all of us "mud-creatures" are physically mostly water, oxygen, carbon, and a handful of other minerals and chemicals, along with a great deal of empty space. And yet, we are much more than what a friend of mine calls "frisky dirt." So much more!

God "inspires," that is to say, breathes into each of us "earthlings" the gift of life. At our baptisms, our own physical bodies become baptismal fonts – sacred fountains flowing with the life-giving Spirit of God breathing in us for each other.

The readings from Ezekiel and Romans, and especially from John all emphasize the significance of embodiment as the essence of life as God's "mud-creatures." All three readings convey the crucial need for the integration of our physical reality with our spiritual reality.

Many Orthodox see Jesus demonstrating this integration in his act of resurrecting Lazarus. They see his question: "Where have you laid him?" and his genuine grief as evidence of his physical, human nature. And as evidence of his spiritual, divine nature, they see the foretelling of his friend's death and the command for Lazarus to come out of the tomb four days after his death.

We too easily split off and reduce the value of foundational aspects of ourselves. If we disapprove of the human body, we miss the lesson of Ezekiel. If we rely entirely on our physical reality, we miss the point of Paul's letter. God creates humanity as embodied spirit and, in the book of Genesis, calls it not just good, but *very good*.

Learning to integrate the Divine as a central element of our embodied being is how we to live as whole, as holy – to start living resurrection lives right now. John's Gospel story intentionally foreshadows the resurrection of Jesus. And without Ezekiel and Paul's reminders, we might miss or misunderstand a key moment: "*I am* (present tense) the resurrection and the life."

Resurrection, do you see, is not a future event only or a one-time miracle reserved only for Jesus. Resurrection is a quality of existence that has already begun and that will come to fruition in God's own time.

Last week, I told you that “*adama*” is not a man’s name, but a description. In the first creation story, YHWH makes humanity, *adama*, in God’s own image and likeness. In the second creation story, YHWH creates a human and then, recognizing that it is not good for the human to be alone, creates a partner. We call her Eve, but in the Greek used by Jewish scribes, her name is Ζωή, which means “life,” both physical life in the present and spiritual, especially in future existence.

What John’s Jesus shows us is that human life is not simply “frisky dirt” and that eternal life is not simply waiting in the future. Resurrection life is earthly, embodied Spirit that radiates love, light and grace into communities. We can experience eternal life now.

I can’t know what Lazarus felt when he walked out of that tomb into a new reality. But standing in the parking lot of the grocery store, I could feel that the world around me had changed. I know this is temporary, but just for a second, it didn’t feel that way.

What I felt was sad for all those who had lost loved ones or jobs. I felt grateful, and noticed even a little guilt, because my wife and daughters and the rest of my family are fine. I felt mildly irritated that people who didn’t bother with flu shots were now hoarding flour, toilet paper and medical masks that other people needed.

And I felt a wisp, just a mere kiss, of joy.

We could conceivably actually manage to come out of this together if we let compassion thrive in us. We – you and I – may start really seeing the divine presence in others, even in those who seem hell-bent on making us nuts.

The way to welcome that yearning to blossom into our current situation is to seek and trust the loving breath of God at the center of our own being. To contemplate it like Mary did. Mary knew that God would never let go of her brother. And Jesus knew that God always hears.

And to engage the loving breath of God in our earthly lives like Martha did. Martha knew that sickness and suffering and the stench of death are all very real. And Jesus wept.

There is a gentle robustness in the intermingling of these two women that wants to be an inspiring and grounded hope for us.

And he called to Lazarus as he calls to each of us: “Come out and be unbound.”

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