

East Hartford  
Lent 5, 2014

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Ezek 37:1-14, Psa 130, Jn 11:1-45

## Out of the Depths

Every so often it happens. The psalter lesson forms a perfect bridge between the other two lessons. Today is such a day! Our psalm begins, "Out of the depths, I cry to you" and it creates the spiritual bridge between the resurrection vision of Ezekiel, and the resurrection story of Lazarus. Ezekiel "saw" the resurrection of the nation even as the journey into exile was happening. The gospel was written decades after the crucifixion.

The prophet Ezekiel recalls that moment when, "the hand of God came upon me..." "Out of the depths I cry to you..." Depths of fear? Depths of sadness? Depths of despair? "Out of the depths" is enough.

God brought me out and set me down in the middle of the valley. It was full of bones. Full of dry bones. xxxxx Can these bones live? Out of the depths . . .

After the nation was defeated. After ashes marked the place where the temple had stood. After the people were forced to walk hundreds of desert miles from Jerusalem to into exile in Babylon with relentless death on the way, the prophet received a vision. In the midst of the prophet's vision, he was set into the middle of valley, the valley full of very dry bones. God asked "Can these bones live?" Out of the depths the prophet sighed, "O Lord God, you know."

We know - the promise was kept, the people were restored to the land. Israel lived.

Four centuries and more went by. After the exiles had returned, after the temple had been rebuilt, after another yet war had left the Romans victorious, Jesus' friends, Mary and Martha sent a message.

“Jesus, please come. Our brother is dying. Please help.”

But, Lazarus died so his sisters did as custom required. Out of the depths they called out as they cleaned and wrapped their brother’s body and laid the body in the cave that would be his tomb. Out of the depths of their grief they cried out as they heard stone strike stone, closing off the cave that had become his grave. Out of the depths they cried out with anger and sadness and despair. Out of the depths of their hearts they wondered aloud where Jesus had been when they needed him most.

When does this psalm form a perfect bridge from an ancient days to these days?

When did you stand on this bridge most recently? When have you been the one crying out to God from the very depths of your soul and being?

Regarding your life?

The life of someone you love?

Regarding something in the news, perhaps most recently the mudslide in Washington, or the airplane so mysteriously lost, or the fall of Crimea in Ukraine, or the most recent shooting at Fort Hood?

Regarding the beloved creation which surrounds and sustains us?

And, in your times of crying from the depths of your heart and soul, what have you seen of the glory of God?

Back to our texts. You see each text calls us to see the wonder and glory of God.

The passage from Ezekiel concludes with these promises of God.  
*37: 13 You shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 14 I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.”*

The psalm ends “*It is God who will redeem Israel.*”

In the gospel lesson it is Jesus who says that all this is “for God’s glory.” Then in accordance with the whole intent of John’s gospel, Jesus offers a holy “I told you so” when he says to Martha, “*did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?*” John thus ties believing, trusting, with seeing the glory of God.

Now few among us will see or experience the glory of God in the same way as did Mary, Martha, the other disciples and their friends and neighbors. Many perhaps most of us experience God’s glory in creation and in creativity - the ocean sunrise, the perfect harmony in the glorious symphony, the wonder of the infant who sleeps in our arms. All perfectly wonderful manifestations of the glory of God, which are worthy and call forth our profound and deep thanksgiving. But I believe there is more to God’s glory than what we see around us.

I believe all of us become the glory of God as described by an early church father, Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons (writing 175?-185? CE) who wrote, “the glory of God is the human being who is fully alive.” My friends, we are the glory of God as we become fully, completely, totally alive; which is to say, we become the glory of God as we become fully, completely, totally in love, with God, and with all of God’s creation, including our neighbors, and the slugs.

Remember Jesus’ commandments as the stone was removed from the grave. “Come out. Unbind him and let him go.” Let me tell you a little story.

Friends, we cannot fall in love with that which we do not know. A very long time ago, when Cass and I worked in Ellington, our boss told us about a new restaurant in the area. A Vietnamese restaurant called the Lotus. We tried it and liked it. We never would have tried it without the boss’ recommendation, his recommendation set us free from a certain fear. We grew to like it enough that it became our go-to place for lots of

family birthdays and celebrations.

When I was considering coming to this church, I discovered not one, but three Vietnamese restaurants in town. (A selling point for East Hartford for those of you who are on the search committee.) One has a fairly complete menu, the other two, I discovered, specialize in Pho (pronounce fa). Being somewhat afraid of appearing clueless, I hesitated quite awhile before I tried either one - now I am in love, and I head for Pho 99 or Pho 501 at every opportunity. Not only that, I take delight in sharing the goodness of Pho with anyone who is even the least bit willing to try.

Friends, I use this example to say, we cannot love what we do not know. Ignorance is a grave wrapping. Ignorance coupled with fear is a most effective grave wrapping. Grave wrappings hold us back from becoming fully alive.

We usually need some help unbinding the fears that hold us back, whether it be the fear of looking a bit foolish, the fear of trying something new, even something as simple as a new to us place to eat.

Friends, if my recommendation will help unbind the grave wrappings which hold you back - I heartily recommend Pho 99, or Pho 501 or Le's Vietnamese Restaurant. Any or all of them. Try them, the soup is hot and all the food is wonderful.

A new place to eat is absurdly simple. The fears which bind us tight in ways of living run deep and deeper. While I do hope you'll try a new style of food just on my recommendation it takes something more to try a new way of life and love.

So I invite us to the psalm that is ours today. Let Jesus' command become our prayer - Unbind us, O God. Let us cry out from the depths of our hearts, cry out from the depths of our very being for the strength, the courage to love the neighbors we do not know: The neighbors who

are immigrants, the neighbors who are different in politics, in mind set, in life style, in faith. Remember the glory of God is the human being who is fully, deeply completely in love. Let us become the glory of our God.