

## Sunday Reflection, Lent 5

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Ezekiel 37.1-14, John 11: 1 – 45

This is the first of our vicar's weekly Sunday reflections. Read and reflect on it in tandem with the readings for the day as above, also published in our newsletter – click on the Newsletter tab on our home page.



Rev. Rob McUtchen

Where is God when we are in the midst of death or danger, or when all hope seems lost? Some might feel like that just now - excluded from our places of worship and fellowship, almost all the things which define the order of our faith lives now absent, forbidden to gather to worship or break bread as a community, and living lives of virtual isolation. All with the ever-present spectre of a viral illness that can end in death. Sufficient to prompt some to ask – where is God?

Ezekiel in the Valley of Dry Bones attests to the belief that God can and will breathe new life into the most dead of situations. God promises more – that he will raise the people Israel from their graves and bring them back to the land of Israel – restoration of both body and national spirit – a new “people” once again. There is a recurring theme throughout the Old Testament of God creating new beginnings for his people Israel, despite Israel's infidelity and faithlessness. Ezekiel and the Dry Bones is an unusually stark motif of this theme.

Moving to the Gospel and the raising of Lazarus, the question “Where is Jesus in time of crisis?” appears in the context of Jesus' unhurried response to news that Lazarus, a close friend, was dying. Martha had been waiting nearly four days. Her words, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” are almost a reproach and convey that question: “Where were you when we needed you most?”

The Revd Angus Mathieson of the Church of Scotland observes that the Lazarus' raising is about far more than Lazarus being raised from the dead. It speaks of the self-disclosure by Jesus of his divinity: “I am the resurrection and the life.” And it tells us about the one who brings resurrection about. Mathieson sums it up this way: “And into that situation, into their bewilderment, and faltering understanding, Jesus brings Himself. He brings clarity, and the light of the world will bring an end to their stumbling in the dark. His voice calls Lazarus forth from the grave, and calls us today.”

The COVID-19 crisis and its implications are still to be fully understood. It has placed us all at risk of serious illness or death like never before and cast the church into a hitherto unthinkable situation from which some parts may not recover. We are entering our own “valley of the shadow of death”, and may find ourselves wanting to cry out, “Where is God in all this”? Mathieson asks: “How do we open ourselves to the living breath of God's Spirit, and the one who proclaims, “I am the resurrection and the life”? Jesus journeys with us, and has shown through Lazarus and his own journey, that nothing, not even death, can keep us apart from God's love (Romans 8).

Let us hold this close in the days ahead.

Amen.

