



## Fifth Sunday in Lent Sunday, March 29th, 2020

### Becoming Truly Human and Christian: Bending Toward Life



What is so appealing about the stories of Christopher Robin and his entourage of friends, is the celebration of life in and through relationships, the way in which they *all bend toward life*. The Gospel reading today is the fourth in a series that come to us from John: Nicodemus (Lent 2) The Woman at the Well (Lent 3), the Blind Man (Lent 4) and today the ultimate testimony to life, the story of the raising of Lazarus, an anticipation, a precursor to the resurrection of Jesus. Each story that we have thought about these last weeks, has carried two connected themes: the first, has been about friendship with Jesus and the degrees of belief *in* him – Nicodemus falls short, the woman at the well does better, but it is the blind man who does best. Today we focus upon Mary and Martha. The second theme, has concerned what belief in Jesus actually means. For John, belief in Jesus is all about the immediacy, the *now* of life over death, and the courage to put life into practice in contexts where death has the upper hand. John invites his community to *bend toward life* in the confidence that God *is* life. John believes in life both *before* and *after* death.

## GATHERING

### Nothing Can Trouble

820

*Nada te turbe*

1

Noth-ing can trou - ble; noth-ing can fright - en. Those who seek  
Na - da te tur - be, na - da te gs - pan - te. Quien a Dios

2

God shall nev - er go want - ing, God a - lone fills us.  
tie - ne na - da le fal - ta. So - lo Dios bas - ta.

This meditative refrain from Taizé is based on a saying attributed to Teresa of Avila: "Let nothing trouble you; let nothing frighten you. All things are passing; God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever possesses God lacks nothing; God alone suffices."

TEXT: Attr. Teresa of Avila, 16th cent.; para. Taizé Community: Spanish, 1986; English, 1995  
MUSIC: Jacques Berthier, 1986

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NADA TE TURBE  
Irregular

## Welcome

In the name of God the Father  
In the name of the Son  
In the name of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with  
***And also with you***

## We light the Paschal Candle

**Let's Sing: O for a thousand tongues to sing (TIS 210, Lyngham, Charles Wesley)**

## A Meditation about Bending Toward Life

In this piece, we draw from the experience of Martha: "*If only Lord you had been here*". The point of the story of the raising of Lazarus is that God *is* here, *is* present, although our psychological awareness of and sensitivity to God's presence varies, depending upon a range of factors, including anxiety, stress and pain, which more often than not, shroud everything in a pall of deadness. Ultimately, Jesus points us to an engaged God who intervenes in favour of life.

Lord, if you had been here  
when the cancer became untreatable,  
when the clot travelled the artery,

when the mudslide left the mountain,  
when the airplane met the sea,

when the heart ceased its drumming  
and the tired marcher rested  
from its long parade,

Lord, if you had been here  
in the hospital room,  
the bedroom,  
the shopping mall,  
the street,

if you had been here  
when it happened  
in the evening,  
in the morning,  
in the afternoon,

if you had been here  
when it was too soon,  
when it was too quick,  
when it was too late,  
when it took too long,

Lord, if you had been here  
for our brother,  
sister,  
daughter,  
son,  
the loved one  
who passed beyond our reach

***would death have won?***

But you *have* been here.  
Here by the bedside,

by the roadside,  
by the graveside,  
by our side  
in the confining caves of grief.  
You are here  
where tears remain wet  
on hurt faces.  
You are here  
where hearts remain  
shrouded by the pain  
you feel with us,  
and for us as well.

You were there at  
the grave of Lazarus,  
irretrievably lost to  
his family and friends,  
*but not lost to you;*  
gone beyond  
their loving reach  
but not yours.  
You were there  
and the stone  
was removed from the tomb.  
You were there  
with your shout  
and the air  
held its breath.  
You were there  
and burial cloths were unbound  
and lost Lazarus  
opened his eyes  
to the sun.

And you are here, Lord,  
in the hospital room,  
in the bedroom,  
the shopping mall,  
the street.  
You are here

drying tears on hurt faces,  
setting free the bound ones  
from the shrouds of death,  
leading us out  
of whatever caves are confining us  
and reminding us  
that in you  
death will not triumph:

***your love  
that has no limits  
has won.***

Thanks to Andrew King

## **Lent Event: Week 5**

This week we continue the journey with the people of Ambon: turning to the youth of the region, Let's listen to them as they talk among themselves about taking a different path to the future – one that rejects religious intolerance and extremism. Our partners in Ambon are equipping high school students with the skills to build peace and engage with different faiths and beliefs – and they can't get enough

<https://fundraise.unitingworld.org.au/event/lent-event/be-inspired>

## **LET'S HEAR THE WORD**

### **Some Anecdotes about Lazarus, Resurrection and Life from Unexpected Sources**

The Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, the raising of Lazarus, even the Old Testament miracles, all are freely used for religious propaganda, and they are very effective with an audience of unsophisticates and children

**Richard Dawkins**

**Kerry O'Brien:** Do you see yourself as having another chance at the leadership at some future time?

**John Howard:** Oh, that's Lazarus with a triple bypass...

***Sunday, Channel 9, 27 July 2003***

Every parting gives a foretaste of death, every reunion a hint of the resurrection. **Arthur Schopenhauer**

Jesus' response to Martha is, "Your brother will rise again." She hears this as - it seems to me - a confessional formula and immediately goes into her confirmation mode by saying the right doctrinal thing: "I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Martha is willing to accept resurrection as some abstract thing that happens so far in the future that it has no meaningful impact on her moment. But Jesus is not talking about an abstract doctrine of an abstract future that has no bearing on the now. Jesus cups her face in his hands and looks her in the eyes and says, "I am the resurrection and the life." I am - here and now - I am - not was, not will be - I am the resurrection and the life. It seems that to locate the resurrection in the future, near or distant, is to misunderstand what it means. It is now!

**Mark Davis**

The New Testament thesis of John's Gospel is that the Messiah is *now*, and because the Messiah is now, the Kingdom is now, history has definitively changed. But how are we to reconcile this meaning of history transformed, bending toward life and justice, with the indisputable fact that in the nineteen centuries since the Messiah entered the world, there has been little perceptible realization of the resurrection and of justice, which is after-all what the doctrine of resurrection points us to?

**José Porfirio Miranda**

### **Ezekiel 37:1-14 (The Message)**

Ezekiel was a prophet who lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, at the time of the Babylonian exile of the leadership of Judea. His visions and prophecies tend to have an 'other worldly character', with him placed on mountain tops, in valleys and in plains. That said, they are always grounded in the historical reality of the region and respond to the political circumstances of the southern kingdom of Judea, of which Jerusalem was the capital. In this reading, perhaps the best known of all, Ezekiel is ordered by God to prophecy to the dry bones, the ruins of what was Israel. He and we, watch as the bones reconnect and come to life and the graves open". Israel experiences renewal and resurrection. This imagery is astounding. It speaks of the restoration of a disheartened and oppressed people. No wonder the Afro-American people put it to music in the spiritual "Dem Bones".

**37** <sup>1-2</sup> GOD grabbed me. GOD's Spirit took me up and set me down in the middle of an open plain strewn with bones. He led me around and among them—a lot of bones! There were bones all over the plain—dry bones, bleached by the sun.

<sup>3</sup> He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "Master GOD, only you know that."

<sup>4</sup> He said to me, “Prophecy over these bones: ‘Dry bones, listen to the Message of GOD!’”

<sup>5-6</sup> GOD, the Master, told the dry bones, “Watch this: I’m bringing the breath of life to you and you’ll come to life. I’ll attach sinews to you, put meat on your bones, cover you with skin, and breathe life into you. You’ll come alive and you’ll realize that I am GOD!”

<sup>7-8</sup> I prophesied just as I’d been commanded. As I prophesied, there was a sound and, oh, rustling! The bones moved and came together, bone to bone. I kept watching. Sinews formed, then muscles on the bones, then skin stretched over them. But they had no breath in them.

<sup>9</sup> He said to me, “Prophecy to the breath. Prophecy, son of man. Tell the breath, ‘GOD, the Master, says, Come from the four winds. Come, breath. Breathe on these slain bodies. Breathe life!’”

<sup>10</sup> So I prophesied, just as he commanded me. The breath entered them and they came alive! They stood up on their feet, a huge army.

<sup>11</sup> Then God said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Listen to what they’re saying: ‘Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone, there’s nothing left of us.’”

<sup>12-14</sup> “Therefore, prophecy. Tell them, ‘GOD, the Master, says: I’ll dig up your graves and bring you out alive—O my people! Then I’ll take you straight to the land of Israel. When I dig up graves and bring you out as my people, you’ll realize that I am GOD. I’ll breathe my life into you and you’ll live. Then I’ll lead you straight back to your land and you’ll realize that I am GOD. I’ve said it and I’ll do it. GOD’s Decree.’”

## **Psalm 130**

Psalm 130 is a fitting psalm to accompany the theme of restoration/resurrection in the Old Testament and Gospel readings today. It speaks of a cry from the depths, the darkest place, seeking forgiveness (v. 3) and redemption (v. 7). The psalm is part of a collection (Psalms 120-134) identified within the Psalter as the ‘songs of Ascents’. They have the common superscription ‘a song of ascents’. Just what that means is debatable. It could be related to the use of the verb ‘to go up’, in regard to the exiles returning to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:1; 7:9). It could indicate the collection is related to pilgrimage in general. Alternatively, the Mishnah implies a liturgical function seeing one psalm sung on each of the fifteen steps between the women’s court and the court of Israel in the Jerusalem temple complex. The collection has traditionally been used in the festival of Sukkot (Tabernacles) recalling the wilderness wanderings.

<sup>1</sup> Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

<sup>2</sup> ***Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!***

<sup>3</sup>If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

<sup>4</sup>***But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.***

<sup>5</sup>I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

<sup>6</sup>***my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.***

<sup>7</sup>O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.

<sup>8</sup>**It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.**

### **Romans 8:1-11 (New English Translation)**

Paul's thought is often misunderstood. At its centre is the idea of two ways of life: "according to the flesh" and "according to the Spirit". Many people seem to interpret the life according to the flesh as connected to sex, while life according to the Spirit, transcends sex. This is all nonsense – not helped by the early monastic movements - and it is extraordinary how Christian theology could have lost its way so dramatically in its misinterpretation of Paul, and in its adoption of a world view which is so thoroughly bizarre. To live according to the flesh has nothing to do with the body, especially the sexual body: the idea of flesh or "sarx" in the Greek, has to do with self-centred-ness, egotism, narcissism: the sort of alienation that marks the human condition in Romans 7. Alternatively, life according to the spirit, has to do with loving and being loved – and not just the small circle of people like us – but rather more broadly and generously. It has to do with lowering the defences – our religious, cultural and class barriers – that lead us to a living death. But what does this have to do with the "law" meaning the religious law of Judaism, which became an issue as Jews became Christians? For Paul, religious law chimes in with life according to the flesh for the simple reason that when we are told what not to do (this is what laws are – about prohibition), we then automatically are reminded of those very things. In other words, the law, through its prohibitive nature, attracts us back to a self-obsessed lifestyle, while at the same time, not providing us with the internal, existential resources we need to live well, fairly and justly. This is what the Spirit of God actually gives us, which a body of codified law cannot – the resources to live spiritually: that is to live through love.

**8** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> For the law of the life-giving Spirit in Christ Jesus has set you<sup>1</sup> free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For God achieved what the law could not do because<sup>1</sup> it was weakened through the flesh. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and concerning sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> so that the righteous requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

<sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh have their outlook shaped by the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their outlook shaped by the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> For the outlook of the flesh is death, but the outlook of the Spirit is life and peace, <sup>7</sup> because the

outlook of the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to the law of God, nor is it able to do so. <sup>8</sup> Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <sup>9</sup> You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this person does not belong to him. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is your life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> Moreover if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also make your mortal bodies alive through his Spirit who lives in you.

### **John 11:1-45 (New English Translation)**

This is the quintessential story about life, life that comes in and through Jesus. What drives this long story, is the conviction of John's community that this new life is *now*, and the metaphor that indicates this, is Lazarus' resurrection, *now*. Martha, is a bit like the woman at the well: she affirms the doctrine of the resurrection, she thinks that one day it will happen, but so what? The shock here is that it actually happens" Lazarus lives! Jesus overturns traditional Jewish doctrine – and indeed what has become to be traditional Christian interpretation – pointing out that the concrete sign of the genuine-ness of Jesus, Messiahship is precisely Lazarus' resurrection in the present, not in some distant, postponed future. This story and more broadly John's Gospel should make us very uncomfortable since it challenges us to actually believe and live-for the commitment to resurrection, life and justice in the world now. The French scholar Henri van den Bussche (1920-65) in his commentary *Jean*, puts it provocatively in a way which forces us to rethink our traditional way of understanding the idea of eternal life: "Eternal life, is not life after death, but life that knows no death"

**11** Now a certain man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village where Mary and her sister Martha lived. <sup>2</sup> (Now it was Mary who anointed the Lord with perfumed oil and wiped his feet dry with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, look, the one you love is sick." <sup>4</sup> When Jesus heard this, he said, "This sickness will not lead to death, but to God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." <sup>5</sup> (Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.)

<sup>6</sup> So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he remained in the place where he was for two more days. <sup>7</sup> Then after this, he said to his disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." <sup>8</sup> The disciples replied, "Rabbi, the Jewish leaders were just now trying to stone you to death! Are you going there again?" <sup>9</sup> Jesus replied "Are there not twelve hours in a day? If anyone walks around in the daytime, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. <sup>10</sup> But if anyone walks around at night he stumbles because the light is not in him."

<sup>11</sup> After he said this, he added "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep But I am going there to awaken him." <sup>12</sup> Then the disciples replied, "Lord, if he

has fallen asleep, he will recover.” <sup>13</sup> (Now Jesus had been talking about his death, but they thought he had been talking about real sleep.)

<sup>14</sup> Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, <sup>15</sup> and I am glad for your sake that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” <sup>16</sup> So Thomas (called Didymus) said to his fellow disciples, “Let us go too, so that we may die with him.”

### Speaking with Martha and Mary

<sup>17</sup> When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had been in the tomb four days already. <sup>18</sup> (Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup> so many of the Jewish people of the region had come to Martha and Mary to console them over the loss of their brother.) <sup>20</sup> So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary was sitting in the house. <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will grant you.”

<sup>23</sup> Jesus replied “Your brother will come back to life again.” <sup>24</sup> Martha said, “I know that he will come back to life again in the resurrection at the last day.” <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live<sup>l</sup> even if he dies, <sup>26</sup> and the one who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” <sup>27</sup> She replied, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who comes into the world.”

<sup>28</sup> And when she had said this, Martha went and called her sister Mary, saying privately, “The Teacher is here and is asking for you.” <sup>29</sup> So when Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup> (Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still in the place where Martha had come out to meet him.) <sup>31</sup> Then the people who were with Mary in the house consoling her saw her get up quickly and go out. They followed her, because they thought she was going to the tomb to weep there.

<sup>32</sup> Now when Mary came to the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” <sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the people who had come with her weeping, he was intensely moved in spirit and greatly distressed. <sup>34</sup> He asked, “Where have you laid him?” They replied, “Lord, come and see.” <sup>35</sup> Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup> Thus the people who had come to mourn said, “Look how much he loved him!” <sup>37</sup> But some of them

said, “This is the man who caused the blind man to see! Couldn’t he have done something to keep Lazarus from dying?”

<sup>38</sup> Jesus, intensely moved again, came to the tomb. (Now it was a cave, and a stone was placed across it.) <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the deceased, replied, “Lord, by this time the body will have a bad smell, because he has been buried four days.” <sup>40</sup> Jesus responded, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believe, you would see the glory of God?” <sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you that you have listened to me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that you always listen to me, but I said this for the sake of the crowd standing around here, that they may believe that you sent me.” <sup>43</sup> When he had said this, he shouted in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” <sup>44</sup> The one who had died came out, his feet and hands tied up with strips of cloth, and a cloth wrapped around his face. Jesus said to them, “Unwrap him and let him go.”

<sup>45</sup> Then many of the people, who had come with Mary and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in him.

The Gospel of the Lord  
***Praise to you Lord Christ***

**Film Clip from “Rabbit Proof Fence” (2002, Phillip Noyce)** The Christian faith says something that is amazingly courageous: that the God of Life prevails over death, on both sides of the grave. It is because God overcomes death in the beyond for us, that we are entrusted with a mission in the promotion of life over death in the present, in the here and now. The difficulty however, is to read, interpret, to discern our present with a degree of historical awareness and prophetic insight. To do otherwise, is to often mistake life for death and death for life, which leads to tragedy and suffering. In this clip, we look back at the 1930s to Western Australian practice under the *Chief Protector of Aborigines*, Mr AO Neville – this is real history – who in the name of protection, did the opposite: promoted the death of aboriginal identity as inevitable, reasonable and ethical. The story revolves around the lives of three sisters, Molly, Daisy and Gracie, who resist being taken from their families in Jigalong to Moore River Native Settlement in the south.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8AgFWn99O8>

**Some thoughts about life and death...**

**Let’s Give**

**Doxology**

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,  
praise him, all creatures here below,  
praise him above, ye heavenly host,  
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

## **Prayer of Dedication**

### **Prayers of the People**

The one who prays, ends the petition with the words, "May we bend toward life" and the congregational response, is "may we read the signs of the times".

### **Hymn: Jesus! the name high over all (TIS 218, Lydia Charles Wesley)**

#### **Blessing**

May we live,  
tenaciously *bending toward life*,  
confronting our brokenness.  
May we discern the spirits  
May we read the signs of the times  
And channel our desire for *Christ's* purposes

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

***In the name of Christ***

***Amen***

### **Musical Meditation – Alleluia (TiS 702, Taizé, Alleluia 7, Jacques Berthier)**

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xE01AXL72yI>

## **Closing Postlude**



Thanks to Dad Hengeveld (See John 11:1-45) 05-15-2002

YOU CAN KEEP YOUR DEATH AND  
RESURRECTION CERTIFICATES, MR LAZARUS  
... WE ONLY NEED THE BIRTH ONE