

LENT: A TIME TO FOLLOW JESUS TO THE CROSS

Fifth Sunday in Lent

April 10, 2011

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 130

Romans 8:6-11

John 11:1-45

I Felt the Lord's Power

Perhaps you've heard people refer to Lent as a "downer." Probe a little, and I expect you will often find that this is a reaction against the notion of Lent as a fast or time of deprivation (so seldom observed), against a somber or even dreary quality in some of the music and worship, or against a focus on our sinfulness which may seem extreme.

Yet, the story of Lent, as we journey with Jesus to Jerusalem and his Passion, is essentially forward-looking. There is a direction to the story. Even as we remember Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and death, we are hearing the story from the other side.

These stories, though, speak to where we are. We do not always live in the land of resurrection. These places of dry bones, these decaying bodies, these sealed tombs are real to us. Sometimes our sin brings destruction upon us. Sometimes, the sin of others crashes into our lives. And the result *is* dry bones.

The prophet Ezekiel is taken to a valley full of bones. These could have been the bleached remains of a battle or massacre. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo there are the bones of burned villages today. In our own land we still find the burial grounds of slaves and Native Americans. But we don't have to look across the world or back in time to see bones in a sea of troubles.

A modern Ezekiel might be taken to a small town on the prairie where the local businesses are dried up and the next generation is exiled to another land. He or she might walk down the streets in certain neighborhoods, looking at foreclosure properties. The prophet might be transported by bus to the furthest corners of our states, where prison fortresses keep some folks' bones out of sight and far from home.

Looking at places and problems like these, we may be too daunted to believe that even God can make a difference. "LORD God, only you can tell [if these bones can live]" (Ezekiel 37:3) could be a faithful answer – it is certainly a cautious one.

But the church tells these stories because we have felt the Lord's power; as a people we have seen with our own eyes and known in our lives that God is a God of deliverance.

God's work does not stop when we humans have done our worst. Ask relief workers, ask the descendants of slaves and other survivors of genocide, get a reality check from those in prison ministries.

“Can these bones live?” If you can't wait for Easter, ask Lazarus.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Paul Bellan-Boyer who lives in Jersey City, New Jersey. To see Paul's reflections throughout the year, visit his blog at citycalledheaven.blogspot.com.

+ + +

This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: England & Wales – with thanks to God that this year marks the 400th anniversary of the Authorized Version of the Bible, which has shaped Christian faith in English-speaking countries; also give thanks for the 2011 Trust to celebrate the huge impact of the Authorized Version on the English language, literature and culture; and with prayers for continued impact of the Bible in Britain; **France** – with thanks to God for continued impact of the Bible exhibition in France and French-speaking countries, and for successful distribution of Luke's Gospel in Sign Language; and with prayers that the exhibition will attract one million visitors over 10 years, and for the impact of small-scale exhibitions in educational settings; also pray for the May launch of the Youth Bible, which follows the launch of the new edition of the ecumenical translation of the Bible, and for successful advertising among young people.

Activity Corner: Prayers of Hope and Trust

Supplies needed: Bible; writing paper; pens/pencils.

In this week's Gospel text, Jesus says that he is “the resurrection and the life” (11:25). With members of your household, discuss what Jesus means when he refers to himself as “the resurrection and the life.” In what ways is John 11:1-45 a source of hope? Read together Psalm 130. Ask everyone to copy verse 5 at the top of a piece of paper and encourage each one to list their hopes. On the reverse side, ask each one to compose a prayer of trust, based on their hopes. Invite everyone to share their prayers throughout the week during devotional time.