

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Communion at the Vicarage (Corona)**

**Text: Ezek 37:1-14 John 11: 17-27, 32-38, 43-44**

**ITS FRIDAY BUT SUNDAY IS COMING**

*Some of you here are veterans of “New Wine” .... Jenny and I have a longer heritage .. we are veterans of “Royal Week”*

*- A forerunner of Spring Harvest & New Wine and such things*

*We were young, so to be honest it was awhile ago .. about 40 years*

*But, extraordinarily, I can remember one of the talks given... “It’s Friday but Sunday’s Coming”*

*... We were so impressed that Jenny and I even bought the T-shirts*

*- “It’s Friday but Sunday’s Coming” – I told you we were young*

*... The talk at Royal Week was given by a youngish Tony Campolo, .. he had taken the title from the famous preacher Lockridge*

*➤ It’s Friday but Sunday’s Coming*

... Always so pertinent but especially in times like this time of Corona

... It’s Friday but Sunday’s Coming

➤ Our faith in Christ always brings together, suffering and new life, death and Resurrection,

... Our faith is always about sure Hope ... God’s Kingdom will come

The agony of Good Friday becomes the glory of Easter Day

➤ As the Psalmist writes: “Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” - (Psalm 30:5)

We can rejoice in God that in His love, grace and mercy, Resurrection comes

... We can rejoice that this time of Corona will come to an end

But, as our faith tells us, you cannot skip quickly to Sunday, to Resurrection

... we have to recognise and live in the reality of “It’s Friday”

.. There has to be lament, sorrow and grief if we are truly to know our existence

➤ In all situations, we go on seeking the God of love who is often disguised but never absent...

There is a whole book of the Bible called, “Lamentations” for a reason

- pain, suffering, the need for lament and repentance, is simply a fact of life

.... But even that author in his great sorrow is sustained by hope in God

“Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail” he says...

<sup>23</sup> They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” (3:22-23)

Always hope, God’s compassions never fail, great is His faithfulness ...

The two Bible readings today are all about death, dying and the glory of new life,  
Resurrection, - readings full of glorious hope and truth, but also the pain of suffering and death

- The Ezekiel passage is about the raising of a dead nation, “The Valley of Dry Bones” coming to life
- The John passage, in the raising of Lazarus, is a beautiful personal story about the preciousness of life, new life after death

National and personal .. accounts that tell us that our God is the God of Resurrection, in Him new life does, will come

... To say again, though, neither of these accounts, skip quickly to the joy of Resurrection

... they profoundly reflect on the trauma, deep sadness, awfulness of death and dying..

### **EZEKIEL 37:1-14**

First, the Resurrection of a nation in Ezekiel

It’s been said that you never invited an Old Testament prophet to dinner more than once

.. and how that must have been the case for Ezekiel

➤ For 24 chapters of his writings, he was a prophet of inexorable doom

... He was speaking in c. 593 BC, into the catastrophe of the collapse of the nations of Israel and Judah, and their Exile in Babylon

... Ezekiel tells the remnant of Israelites that disaster has come upon them because they are an “obstinate and rebellious” people.

Ezekiel’s vision over these first chapters is so grim and graphic that there was a move amongst Jewish leaders in the First Century AD to have it removed from public use

... In Ezekiel’s own time, his message was so unpopular that the locals tied him up so he couldn’t go out preaching (Ezek 3:25f)

*Ezekiel was sustained by two things. First, early on he was given a glorious vision of heaven (1:22-28)*

*... there is glory beyond this life, the new heaven, the new earth ... Sure hope*

*... All of us, who seek to serve God, need to hold to this glorious vision – heaven is our home*

*Second, Ezekiel took God’s Word into His whole being – quite literally he eats a scroll with God’s word on it – “On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe” (2:10 – 3:3)*

In his deep faith in God, Ezekiel was not afraid to tell it as it is

... no easy skipping to the love and mercy of God, no triumphalism that tries to deny the reality of the mess we are in

And yet, Ezekiel knows that the God of love and mercy is still at work..

.. There have been hints early on in the book – for example Chapter 11 where we first hear a the key message of the book:

“I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (v 19-20)

Then comes the wonderful vision of chapter 37

... In Exile in Babylon, Israel are a dead people – just like piles of bones, “very dry”, long dead

And God raises them by the power of His Word and Spirit

- “Prophecy” He says, Preach

.. Ezekiel does so: “I prophesied as I was commanded” he says

And the living word of God then invades the valley of the shadow of death

- The Spirit, *Ruach*, is at work, bringing new life, and the promise of restoration
- which, of course, happens for the people of Israel when they are allowed to return home, be a nation again around 50 years later

This word “Ruach”, Spirit is used 10 times in these 14 verses of Ezekiel

.. it is used in three different ways

- For the Spirit of God,
- For the breath of man
- And for the breath of the wind
- The implication is surely that Resurrection for a nation, restoration comes through a combination of God, man and nature being in harmony, listening to/accepting God’s word.

## **LAZARUS**

Ezekiel, then, talks about the Resurrection of a nation

... The story of Lazarus brings the power and poignancy down to the individual

- There is so much we can draw here from this account, how the shock, bitterness, sheer grief of death has to be experienced before the power of resurrection truly comes.

Jesus, of course, knew that Lazarus would rise, but, again for Him, that did not mean he skipped straight to triumphalism

.. “he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled .. Jesus wept”

*And there is the direct anger of Martha at Jesus and, perhaps more woundingly, Mary’s quiet, subdued disappointment in Him.*

➤ *Both sisters saying to Jesus: “Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died”*

The honesty of the grief and lament amplifies the miracle of new life that is about to happen

➤ After the bitterness of death and disappointment in Jesus, how everything must have been so different after Lazarus is raised..

...Lazarus, himself must have been a changed man, .. surely

... You would, wouldn’t you have a much greater appreciation of life

And so, for Martha and Mary too .. this family enjoying new life...

...Surely never again would you take for granted the food you eat, the health you have, the beauty of nature, the love of family and friends,

Surely, if you lost all these things, and then, were given another chance of life, you would be changed

... you wouldn’t be grumpy or complaining, you would surely treasure every day, every moment ... you would know how precious this life is...

And you would be so grateful to Jesus, to God, wouldn’t you for what He has done for you

- Imagine the gratitude of Lazarus and Martha and Mary reunited as family

## **OUR RESPONSE**

As we are in this time of crisis, what can we learn from the biblical accounts of first, the raising of a nation, and second, the raising of an individual ?

- (i) Hope in all situations is the hall-mark of our faith....Our God is indeed the God of Resurrection, bringing new life, God’s presence may be disguised but He is never absent....
- (ii) We can, must, like Ezekiel, keep to the fore, the glorious reality of heaven .. this world is not our home
- In the death and resurrection of Jesus, sin, death and the devil have been overcome, there will be a new heaven and a new earth, where there will be no more death or mourning, and God will wipe every tear from our eyes..

Like Ezekiel in his glorious vision, we know this is our home, we watch, work and pray for it, God’s Kingdom to come

- (iii) We cannot focus only on the joy of Resurrection .. there has to be mourning, lament, grief expressed.
- .... We have to fully appreciate, understand what has happened

(iv) We have to call on the power of God...

- We have to be people of His Word, ingesting the Scriptures and encountering the Word made flesh, Jesus.
- We have to seek the power of Ruach – The Holy Spirit, humanity and nature – working in harmony

(v) And we have to be changed. After crisis, when we are given new life, we cannot go back to where we were

- We surely have to have a greater appreciation of life and its fragility ..  
... we have to learn to live in a different way

It is our grief, and lament in this time of the Corona Virus that will make sure that we do change .. recognising what we have lost, and the even greater loss that could have occurred

This crisis of Corona is bad enough. But, we're told it could be far worse. Apparently, there are a whole reservoir of viruses waiting to skip species and wipe out mankind.

We have had several near misses over recent years – SARS, swine flu, ebola

And Climate Change has not gone away – the existential threat is still there..

... Now through this crisis, we have to learn and change – lament, repent..

## **CONCLUSION**

It's Friday but Sunday's coming. Hold the two together – the sure hope, and the grief, mourning, lament, deep learning

...and know that God is ever present

“Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail” he says...

<sup>23</sup> They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

Hope is the hallmark of our faith. We believe in the God of Resurrection.

We are citizens of the glory of heaven

In this time of Corona we can rejoice that yes, it's Friday but Sunday's coming .. the crisis will end

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail" he says...

<sup>23</sup> They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness

So will we be changed after the trauma of Corona Virus ?

... As we experience forms of death, in what we have temporarily lost, and for many permanent losses in livelihoods and literal death itself, will we be changed ?

Will we have a much deeper appreciation of the preciousness of life in all its forms ?

Will we live in a better way, respecting the fragility of life ? Will we want to live simply and sustainably ?

Are we grieving now, calling on God for His mercy and strength ?

Will we allow the power of Christ to bring re-creation ?