

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt
Fifth Sunday in Lent - Year A
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Second Sunday of Quarantine Worship
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Psalm 130
Romans 8:6-11
John 11:1-45
03/29/2020

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

1Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.
2Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 3So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." 4But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." 5Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. 10But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." 11After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." 12The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." 13Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." 17When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." 23Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." 28When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." 29And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." 33When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35Jesus began to weep. 36So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." 40Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." 43When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped

in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” 45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

The End is Nigh

Good morning! On Halloween evening, on October 30th, 1938, Orson Welles began a radio adaptation of H.G. Wells’ famous book *The War of the Worlds*. The show was meant to sound like broadcasters were giving live updates of the Martian invasion, but the creators were smart enough to make an announcement at the beginning of the show that this was all a work of fiction, and not to be worried. There was only one problem... There was a much more popular show on a different radio station, and so when the alert was given, most people didn’t hear it. When NBC’s popular show *Chase and Sunburn Hour* hit their first break, most listeners changed stations to the production of *The War of the Worlds*, all without context. The ensuing panic is the stuff of legends, but it continues to show the power that this type of end-time entertainment can have on us.

All of this came back to me as I sat in my living room this week watching the 2005 version *The War of the Worlds* with Tom Cruise. This isn’t the only apocalyptic movie I have ready, movies like *28 Days Later*, *I Am Legend*, and Charlton Heston’s great *Omega Man* are waiting in a stack on my entertainment center. Interestingly, I’m not the only one indulging in world-ending movie watching. When the Coronavirus first started to spread, the 2011 film *Contagion* shot up to the top 10 list of movies being rented on the iTunes store.

As a species, we’re fascinated with the apocalyptic genre. Just in my time here on earth I’ve experienced plenty of world ending events. In 2012 the Mayan calendar ended and some thought that would be the end of the world. Before that we thought it was all over on New Year’s Eve in 1999. The Cold War was the fear before that, and so on we go back through time. And don’t think that this is some new phenomenon, humanity has been largely convinced that the end was nigh for most of our existence.

I took a class in undergraduate on apocalyptic literature and we studied books in the Bible like Revelation in the New Testament and Daniel in the Old Testament. We also looked at non-canonical books, books that didn’t make it into the Bible, like Enoch and others. One of my favorite parts of the class was when we studied modern apocalyptic genres in things like literature and film. By the end of the class we started to notice something really interesting. In all of the “world ending” events that we studied, and especially in modern films, there is always a group that survives. Remember that...

We see strong apocalyptic themes in today’s first reading in Ezekiel. Bones coming together, God bringing a remnant back to life. It’s God’s breath, God’s speech, that brings those bones back to life. It makes me think of God speaking creation into being in the Genesis creation stories. God’s *ruah*, the same word for breath used here in Ezekiel and when God creates Adam, is what brings us to new life. It’s impossible to not draw comparisons to the Gospel text where Jesus uses his words, his *ruah*, to bring Lazarus back to life.

When all hope is lost, God surprises us. For Ezekiel and the Israelites in our first reading they are trying to understand how to recover after the Babylonian captivity. How does Israel even have a future after something so devastating? In our Gospel

reading it's the death of a family member that seems so world ending for Martha and Mary. In our grief it can seem like all hope is lost, that the future holds nothing. That's why I love the faith of Martha in the Gospel story. She's the perfect model for our faith. She doesn't shy away from letting God know how she feels. *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* She believes that Jesus could have healed him, she doesn't doubt his power, and she's completely open about what she thinks.

But here's the thing, God isn't done with us yet. God wasn't done with Ezekiel and the Israelites, God wasn't done with Martha or Lazarus, and God isn't done with you or me. In every apocalyptic movie, it feels like everything is over, but it never is. It's definitely changed, there's no denying that. And I'm not trivializing the pain that might exist in the meantime, but our God has a power that we can't even begin to comprehend. Right now, the Coronavirus has us afraid and unsure about our future, but human beings are nothing if not tenacious --God created us that way. When this is all over God will shout for us to come out of our tombs, God will speak to our dry bones, breathing life into a people who had felt lost and confused. How do I know? Well, God's done it before, and God's promised to do it again. Amen.