

## Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2023

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Readings        Ezekiel 37:1-14 ([Living Bible](#))  
                     Romans 8:5-8 ([Living Bible](#))

Introduction to John 11:30-45

In John 11 we read of a remarkable story which moves things on in an unexpected way. The story involves Jesus, the disciples and Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus.

Lazarus has become unwell and his sisters are very worried. They send word to Jesus and ask him to come and help Lazarus. This was not an email or a text it would have been a messenger and it would have taken time for Jesus to get the message. His response, we read, is not what you might expect, he seems to know what will happen and what the outcome will be, demonstrating his connection to God and the totality of knowledge. He does not instantly set out for Bethany.

It is two days later when he sets out, and the disciples are worried, fearing the reception as already there has been violence towards Jesus. They wonder if the risk is worth it as Jesus has simply said Lazarus is asleep. Jesus explains he meant Lazarus is dead and he is going to waken him. Still puzzled the disciples decide to go with Jesus.

When they arrive Lazarus has been dead four days and Mary and Martha are distraught, and Martha questions Jesus about why he took so long, believing the outcome could have been different if Jesus had been there. Jesus asks her to trust him. She returns to the house and sends Mary to Jesus.

John 11:30-45 ([Living Bible](#))

Reflection

As we near the end of lent our readings introduce us to the theme of resurrection and new birth. We cannot really know what form our new life in Christ will take but we are encouraged to believe there will be another experience of life. Our story from Ezekiel gives the example of dry bones in a desert graveyard being reconnected and reclothed. There are times in all our lives when we feel dry and worn out, and perhaps times in our church life when we have the same feeling. We could look at the amalgamation as a story of resurrection but as a fan of Doctor Who I am more drawn to the word regeneration. When the doctor's body becomes too faded it regenerates, taking on a new form. All that is the doctor still exists but he, or recently she, looks different, acts differently, has new energy but can still be recognised by those who know the doctor.

In amalgamation we carry with us the stories and all that has made our life together distinct but we will look different, and act differently and certainly have a new energy. In his letter to Romans Paul compares life in the flesh and spiritual life, and it stuck me that setting our minds on the flesh might be like treasuring the body and for church this could equate to our buildings. When we spend too much energy focusing on keeping our buildings going we have less energy to apply to the task of being church. We struggle to reach out and engage in conversations and find time for creating opportunities for conversations. We can become bogged down and that can be exhausting.

Story – [The huge bag of worries](#) by Virginia Ironside

There is quite a lot of worry in our story from John, Mary and Martha are worried about Lazarus, the disciples are worried about returning to Jerusalem and those hidden characters who come to Jesus for healing are filled with worry. Jesus does not seem to be worried, although we do read of his heartfelt compassion for what Mary and Martha have been through.

When it comes to the actual raising of Lazarus Jesus gives three key instructions which are very significant to the process of healing. He says, 'take the stone away', 'Lazarus come out', and 'unbind him'

Take the stone away is a reminder that we are interdependent and there are some things which we cannot do on our own. Lazarus could not push the stone away himself, others had to do that for him. Just like Jenny

in the story someone else had to start the process. We can all have stones trapping us in a place we do not want to be. It could be low self-esteem, a fear of failure or criticism, a lack of skills or confidence, or the effects of bullying and coercion. As we journey we may become aware of a stone in someone else's life, could we help to remove it? A word of encouragement, inviting someone to do something with you, sharing skills or knowledge or helping them to identify the stone which is stopping them and working with them to remove it, just like the old lady in the story.

Come out, Jesus shouts to Lazarus. When we are stuck in a place which is not helping us to grow it can be very hard to leave that place, it can become a comfort zone, however imperfect it is familiar. Fear can paralyse, fear of the unknown can prevent us stepping out on a new path, fear of how we will cope with the change can prevent change. This instruction was personal for Lazarus but it is a challenge each one of us may face at some point. It is about letting go. Lazarus was in the tomb, he was bound in grave cloths but Jesus gives him a choice to stay or to step out in faith. Wherever and however we are held captive we have a choice to stay or step out, maybe we have to let go of something, a fear, something we believe, doubt in our own ability, an addiction even. Someone else can remove the stone but we have to choose to walk out from that place of captivity.

Having walked out Jesus instructs the onlookers to unbind Lazarus. At first glance this seems so obvious that we wonder why Jesus had to say it. Someone wrapped in a shroud is going to need help to get out of the binding and gain full mobility. In German the word unbind comes from *entbinden* which also means to give birth. So, could this be another instance where John is talking about re-birth, an emerging into a new way of life. I am sure Lazarus would have been changed by the experience. We read all the time about how a near-death experience changes the outlook on life.

Each one of us on a journey to be the best expression of humanity that we can be, or as Jesus put it the fullness of our humanity – and at any point this may mean a regeneration or a re-birth as we recognise a dead end on the pathway. We hear the voice saying come out and we turn and allow others to direct us to a new path. Our journey is not one we take in isolation, we are connected in ways we have yet to really imagine, and together we are journeying towards that place of peace, love, justice and equality which we call Kingdom. Every time someone hears the call to come out and responds a little bit more of the kingdom is revealed.

As we approach Holy Week and the story of Easter we are reminded that new life is possible whatever the darkness. This eternal story calls us towards a place we can only yet imagine but which we recognise within our souls as 'home' So, let us help one another by removing the stones that block the path, stepping out from the tomb, and unbinding one another through our shared love and hope in the kingdom.