

CAN THESE BONES LIVE? 5 Lent A

Our scripture lessons today speak of the story of hope beyond the imaginable. Resurrection tells the story of hope and all four passages point to the journey we are on that will end ultimately at Easter. They point us to Jesus risen the firstborn from the dead. This is the bottom line for the Christian faith. If there is no life after death there is no good news in what we say or do as Christians. While we may feel good about our worship and community service the eternal value we proclaim is only temporary without the hope beyond the grave!

CAN THESE BONES LIVE? In the prophet Ezekiel, Israel is given hope that the bones of those that lived in their land can once again live despite their age and their dryness and the fact that Israel is forced to live as captives in another country. The bones represent the house of Israel that has lost hope of ever returning again.

CAN THESE BONES LIVE? Is a question that gets us thinking on a different level. Consider these statements:

- the notion that the limited view of life we see is all that there is;
- the assumption that we should satisfy ourselves in whatever way we can because “you only go around once”;
- the idea that individuals don’t matter in the overall scheme of things;
- the belief that “when our number’s up, it’s all over”;
- the belief that nothing much ever really changes.

Against all of that, Jesus comes along and says, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.”

These were not idle words Jesus spoke to his friends. For Him, they were viable, thoughtful words meant to give hope and comfort. Though in a highly religious Jewish culture that was familiar with the idea of resurrection and life after death how would Jesus make such a concept believable? In 2008 how do we tell a friend that the bones

of our loved ones can live? That our bones can live? If that is the central Christian message how do we tell such a message.

What is important for us to remember was that Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead or Jairus daughter or the widow's son at Nain, was not the resurrection but the hope of it. The new life they experienced was temporary. They were brought back to life only to die one day again. Their miracles would point to the resurrection that would occur only on Easter when Jesus was transformed into a new form of life, incorruptible and unlimited.

So the message of hope to his friends that Jesus brings is not a permanent solution to death. It does however point the way. That is why the story of the raising of Lazarus is known as the half way point of John's gospel. Called the "book of signs," chapters 1 -11 points to hope in an after-life. Part two or the second book of John, chapters 12 – 20, called the "book of glory" tells of God's power to glorify Jesus in his death, which leads to faith and life for his followers.

CAN THESE BONES LIVE? Is a message of hope that we can share with friends and loved ones. We need not get into the question of life after death but talk of the hope that removes despair and keeps us moving forward to the future that God intended for us. The greatest message of hope is that **THERE IS A FUTURE WITH GOD!** Life does continue and we can recapture our dreams even when we are held captive by a force greater than ourselves. The message of Romans is to refuse to set our minds on what is hopeless, but to set the mind on the Spirit which is life and peace. There is a battle for our minds today. We can believe there is no future and there is no hope. Yet, God is in this battle for our minds. Each and every day we must consciously take aim at the target and steady our hands as an archer does before the arrow is released. Ready, Set, Go! Set your minds likewise and do not let negative, hopeless thinking take control while you wait for God to act.

Jesus stayed two days longer where he was before responding to Mary and Martha's pleas for help. Was this cruel? God acts in His own time. Did the sisters not benefit from his delay? Their faith was tested. The time enabled them to set their minds on the Spirit or on death. They needed to make the transition in their minds. They needed to be prepared for the hardest question they would ever hear. **"DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?"** I am the resurrection. Do you believe? (God, don't ask me! I'm not ready to give you the answer!)

Neither was Martha ready to believe though four days had gone by and her brother was rotting away. Grief can wear away even the strongest believer. Jesus asks Martha again. "Did I not tell you...that you would see the glory of God?" Just believe!

What was the most important event that day? Whether Lazarus came back or not

Jesus called forth belief in Him from that cave. That day he called upon the world to believe the hope of new life. It is a hope that gives a glimpse of our future. It is a taste of what will come next.

It is so easy to get lost in the world of the everyday. The world we live in is so pessimistic and has set its mind on death there seems so little hope for it were it not for what God promises it through Christ. May we be able to respond in faith when we hear Jesus' call to come forth. When He calls these old bones dry and crusty and tired to come out may we see afresh the larger meaning of the hope we are asked to trust. Help us Lord - to believe. Help our unbelief. Help us set our minds on the Spirit which is life and peace. AMEN.