

THESE ARE THE READINGS FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

GOD'S WORD FOR THIS WEEK

THROUGH FAITH, WE ARE RAISED FROM DEATH TO LIFE

We are drawing ever closer to Holy Week when Jesus undergoes the incredible events of his Passion. Now, one week before that begins, we hear about our progress from death to life. Through faith in Jesus, we are raised from our spiritual death to a new life in Christ, and we are nurtured in this new life through the Word and Sacraments.

TRADITIONAL FIRST LESSON – EZEKIEL 37:1-14

37¹ *The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. ³ He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "Sovereign LORD, you alone know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!' ⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD." ⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸ I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. ¹¹ Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' ¹² Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴ I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.'"*

Q 1) How does the vision of the dry bones characterize God's people in Ezekiel's time?

The bones were many and very dry. This indicates the widespread condition of God's people as they were exiled in Babylon. Their unfaithfulness had brought about God's judgment, and they seemed beyond the point of resuscitation. Yet God's grace is apparent.

Q 2) What tool was used in restoring life to the dead bones?

The same tool we use today—the Word of God. "Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord."

SUPPLEMENTAL FIRST LESSON – 2 KINGS 4:18-37

4¹⁸ *The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers. ¹⁹ He said to his father, "My head! My head!" His father told a servant, "Carry him to his mother." ²⁰ After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died. ²¹ She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out. ²² She called her husband and said, "Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return." ²³ "Why go to him today?" he asked. "It's not the New Moon or the Sabbath." "That's all right," she said. ²⁴ She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, "Lead on; don't slow down for me unless I tell you." ²⁵ So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel. When he saw her in the distance, the man of God said to his servant Gehazi, "Look! There's the Shunammite! ²⁶ Run to meet her and ask her, 'Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?'" "Everything is all right," she said. ²⁷ When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, "Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me why." ²⁸ "Did I ask you for a son, my lord?" she said. "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes?'" ²⁹ Elisha said to Gehazi, "Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. Don't greet anyone you meet, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy's face." ³⁰ But the child's mother said, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So he got up and followed her. ³¹ Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy's face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, "The boy has not awakened." ³² When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. ³³ He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD. ³⁴ Then he got on the bed and lay on the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out on him, the boy's body grew warm. ³⁵ Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out on him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. ³⁶ Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite." And he did. When she came, he said, "Take your son." ³⁷ She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.*

Q 1) How does this story give comfort to us when tragedy strikes?

The story is heartbreaking: a barren woman gives birth to a promised child. All her hopes and love wrapped themselves up in this little boy, until the day his head hurt. He died in his mother's lap while she rocked him. Can you imagine the tears? Death is the bitter lot we inherited from Adam. But God wants us to know that even in the face of a death as heartrending as this, he promises that whoever believes in him will live, even though he dies. So he lets Elisha pay an advance on the inheritance waiting for the coheirs of Christ, that we might know and believe that Jesus one day will raise us from death to life.

SECOND LESSON – ROMANS 8:11-19

8¹¹ *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.* ¹² *Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it.* ¹³ *For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.* ¹⁴ *For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.* ¹⁵ *The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."* ¹⁶ *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.* ¹⁷ *Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.* ¹⁸ *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.* ¹⁹ *For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.*

Q 1) Through his Spirit, Paul says, God has breathed new life into our mortal bodies. What changes does that bring about?

Paul previously had said that those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. (See [Romans 8:5-8](#).) We now seek to put to death the misdeeds of the body (8:13) and willingly share in Christ's suffering with a view also to sharing in his glory (8:17).

Q 2) Though life in Christ Jesus means sharing his suffering, what other observation is made?

Paul suggests a wise perspective: our present sufferings are "not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." As a runner endures the pain of the exertion by keeping his eyes focused on the finish line, so the Christian's perspective will always be goal-oriented. What waits for us at the end far outshines the clouds that we encounter along the way.

GOSPEL – JOHN 11:17-27,38-45

11¹⁷ *On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.* ¹⁸ *Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,* ¹⁹ *and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.* ²⁰ *When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.* ²¹ *"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died.* ²² *But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."* ²³ *Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."* ²⁴ *Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* ²⁵ *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;* ²⁶ *and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"* ²⁷ *"Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." ...* ³⁸ *Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.* ³⁹ *"Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."* ⁴⁰ *Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"* ⁴¹ *So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."* ⁴³ *When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"* ⁴⁴ *The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."* ⁴⁵ *Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.*

Q 1) What does Jesus mean by saying that he is life?

More than saying that he is the source of life or the giver of life, Jesus for the first time (see also John 14:6) claims to be life itself. There is no life apart from him. Like life itself, final death is impossible for him. The events surrounding the raising of Lazarus occur just days before the Passion events in Jerusalem. What a comfort to know that Jesus was confidently assured of the outcome of his upcoming battle with evil—he would be victorious!

Q 2) How would Mary and Martha see the glory of God in the raising of Lazarus?

Jesus performed the greatest miracle of his ministry to prove to us the certainty of his greatest promise. When Christ saw the effects of death on his loved ones, he wept with them but also promised them that one day even this last enemy would be defeated. Martha often remembered for her busyness, should be remembered for her confession of faith—so complete, so noble—that encompassed everything Jesus had preached. She believed in Jesus' promise of a future resurrection, and so Jesus gave proof to her and to us that his promise is true.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Eternal God and Father, help us to remember Jesus, who obeyed Your will and bore the cross for our salvation that through His anguish, pain, and death we may receive forgiveness of sins and inherit eternal life; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

(All Scripture Readings are from NIV 2011)