**#69 SG BCP & AS HC 26.3.23 Lent 5**

**Ezekiel 37:1-14**

New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

**The Valley of Dry Bones**

**37**The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. **2**He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. **3**He said to me, ‘Mortal, can these bones live?’ I answered, ‘O Lord God, you know.’ **4**Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. **5**Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezekiel%2037:1-14&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-21403a)] to enter you, and you shall live. **6**I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezekiel%2037:1-14&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-21404b)] in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.’

**7**So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. **8**I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. **9**Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath:[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezekiel%2037:1-14&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-21407c)] Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath,[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezekiel%2037:1-14&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-21407d)] and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.’ **10**I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

**11**Then he said to me, ‘Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.” **12**Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. **13**And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. **14**I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.’

# John 11:1-45

# New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

### The Death of Lazarus

**11**Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. **2**Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. **3**So the sisters sent a message to Jesus,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+1-45&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26516a)] ‘Lord, he whom you love is ill.’ **4**But 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.’ **5**Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, **6**after having heard that Lazarus[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+1-45&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26519b)] was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

**7**Then after this he said to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judea again.’ **8**The disciples said to him, ‘Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?’ **9**Jesus 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. **10**But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.’ **11**After saying this, he told them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.’ **12**The disciples said to him, ‘Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.’ **13**Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. **14**Then Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead. **15**For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.’ **16**Thomas, who was called the Twin,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+1-45&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26529c)] said to his fellow-disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’

### Jesus the Resurrection and the Life

**17**When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+1-45&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26530d)] had already been in the tomb for four days. **18**Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+1-45&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26531e)] away, **19**and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. **20**When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. **21**Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. **22**But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.’ **23**Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ **24**Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ **25**Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life.[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+1-45&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26538f)] Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, **26**and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ **27**She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah,[[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+1-45&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26540g)] the Son of God, the one coming into the world.’

### Jesus Weeps

**28**When 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.’ **29**And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. **30**Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. **31**The 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. **32**When 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.’ **33**When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. **34**He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ **35**Jesus began to weep. **36**So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’ **37**But some of them said, ‘Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?’

### Jesus Raises Lazarus to Life

**38**Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. **39**Jesus 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 for four days.’ **40**Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?’ **41**So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, ‘Father, I thank you for having heard me. **42**I 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.’ **43**When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ **44**The 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.’

### The Plot to Kill Jesus

**45**Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

We will eat…

A favourite technique amongst Theological Educators is to arrive at this story and to ask people, ‘are you a Martha, or a Mary’? It’s a good question and one that I have answered differently at different times; in Jesus’s interactions with both sisters, we see many of the possibilities available to us all in our reactions to life. It’s a shame that these women are distilled in the question, though, with our lives, in that question, limiting their characters. So we are asked, are you proactive, or reactive? A contemplative, or a do-er? Relaxed or uptight? These woman are far more characterful than these options suggest.

And St John’s having no truck with any of that sort of thing, I think. What John does, in his textured characterisations of these women, is to give Jesus the chance for extended conversations with them and so with us, giving us the chance to ponder anew, as the hymn has it, just what Jesus is doing now, and why.

It’s *their* depth of character that enriches his, its Martha and Mary’s faith that enriches the portrait of Jesus. In this it also gives us more evidence of Jesus’s nature, a glimpse of how he thought and why he did what he did. So, we see in this story that he is adept in both natural and supernatural worlds; when he’s not settling a domestic issue, or organising tomb logistics, he’s raising someone from the dead.

Who IS this man?

But I wonder if we might look sideways at what’s going on here. The NRSV, in its useful headings that it scatters around the stories, calls this ‘The Death of Lazarus.’ I’ve often thought about it, rather, as ‘The Life of Martha and Mary’; Lazarus, after all, doesn’t have very much of a speaking part does he - difficult when you’re wrapped up, I guess. Lazarus’s actions, prompted by Jesus, are of course prophetic, and are awkwardly so for some theologians – the question, does *a* resurrection happen before *the* Resurrection, did Lazarus beat Jesus to it, is a tricksy one…which we will sidestep for now. But we have no idea what Lazarus thought of it all; he is symbolic, and he does a great job in being so.

John stole a march on the synoptics, the writers of the other three Gospels, because he is the only one to have this Lazarus story. And as we saw a couple of weeks ago, with the story of the wonderful woman at the well, that bright, sparky, faith-longing woman with her own opinions, who’s not defined by the patriarchy within which she lives, John’s presentation of the women in his stories is different; woman have hope, and it’s through women that hope is given to others. Mary and Martha are clearly differentiated as people, and our reading of what happens around them is all the richer for it. They are clearly deep theological thinkers, and are brave with it. Many of John’s women are; even the woman who recognises Peter around the fire, much later on in John, has no fear of expressing herself.

And here its Martha who makes the climatic statement of faith in this story –

‘Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah.’

Mary Magdalene, another Mary, who I bet watched all that happened here in Bethany, is similarly the first to recognise Jesus on Easter day. None of these are minor roles, indeed, they are for the large part apostolic, prophetic roles, and posterity I think hasn’t given them the prominence that their witness deserves.

The women that John writes about are close to Jesus; its hard not to read an intimacy of friendship and ease in the tone of Mary and Martha’s dialogues with Jesus; and in the anointing of him shortly later, we see women in leadership roles, a servant leadership, which is the only sort of leadership that counts to Jesus.

This story, of course, is the last straw for the authorities; very soon indeed we will read of the plot to kill Jesus, and Lazarus too; they don’t seem politically too bothered about Martha and Mary. And we know that they fail; that they are already too late.

In this story we see great flashes of resurrection hope, a foretaste of the great revival that we will celebrate in a fortnight’s time; the movement is from death to life, from Ezekiel’s dryness of bones to the fluidity of animated life. In a nutshell, we witness here the promises that will be fulfilled. ‘I am the resurrection and the life…do you believe this?’ he says. With Martha we pray, ‘Yes, Lord’.

And although it sometimes doesn’t feel so, it *really is* that simple.

Here, alongside the rich faith and intensely practical theology that Martha and Mary are living out, I give a shoutout to my favourite ‘Doubting’ Thomas, here driving the disciples on to experience whatever’s coming in all its fulness; ‘let us go that we may die with him,’ he says. I wish John had recorded a conversation between Martha, Mary and Thomas; they seem to share a sense of wonder in what’s happening around them, and they seem to share the same energy and belief, and love of Christ that transcends all else that they experience.

Thomas, often derided, as Martha and Mary are often overlooked, will be shattered by Good Friday, and broken by that loss, such is love and his wonder, shared by Martha and Mary, shared by all of us, at this thing, this Man, that has come to pass in his life.

But that’s another story, for another day.

Amen