

Fix It, Daddy

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 8:6-11; & John 11:17-45

Saint Paul's Memorial United Methodist Church

1001 W Colfax Ave, South Bend, Indiana 46616

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Ezekiel 37:1-14 (NIV)

¹ The hand of the LORD was upon 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, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophecy 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, "Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, 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 whole house 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: O 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.'"

Romans 8:6-11 (NIV)

⁶ The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; ⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. ¹¹ 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 through his Spirit, who lives in you.

John 11:17-45 (NIV)

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ 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. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.” ²⁸ And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.

³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then 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?”

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 believed, you would 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, put their faith in him.

Fix It, Daddy

In his book *Father Care* Charles Paul Conn tells about his two-year-old daughter, Vanessa, who was given a helium-filled balloon at Sunday school. It was bright blue and seemed almost alive as it danced and floated on the end of her string as she ran through the halls of the church pulling it along behind her. But the inevitable happened. The balloon bumped into the sharp edge of a metal railing and popped. With a single, loud “bang,” it burst and fell to her feet.

She looked down and saw what had been her beautiful balloon, now a forlorn wad of wet blue rubber. It took her, however, only a moment to regain her buoyant mood, as she picked up the remains of her balloon, marched cheerfully to where her father was standing, thrust it up to him and said, “Here, Daddy, fix it.”

Sometimes our lives resemble that wad of wet blue rubber lying there on the church hall floor. “Here, Daddy,” we say to God, “fix it.”

Mary and Martha were two of Jesus’ closest friends. Their brother Lazarus had been seriously ill. Concerned about his welfare, and lacking the medical conveniences that you and I take for granted, they sent for the one man they knew could help them. Mary and Martha had been witnesses to Jesus’ healing power. They felt that their brother would be in no danger if Jesus would come and minister to him.

We can appreciate their feelings. How many times have we thought, “If we can just get him to the hospital, he will be all right...” or “if the doctor just gets here in time, she will recover?”

Jesus, however, did not return in time. Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days by the time Jesus arrived in their village. “Lord,” said the sharp-tongued Martha, “if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Friends, we need to pause here and add a word of caution! Sometimes, like the little girl with the balloon that had burst, we have unrealistic expectations of God. Sooner or later, by some means, everybody dies. Even though Jesus raised Lazarus on this one occasion, Lazarus would one day die. It is difficult to let go of someone we love, but sooner or later we all have to accept the inevitable.

We are grateful for this story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the grave. It demonstrates Jesus’ love and Jesus’ power over death. But the mature Christian understands that death is part of God’s plan, as is life. We pray to hold on to our loved ones, but we trust a loving God to care for those we love whether in life or in death.

Nevertheless, it is a thrilling story! First of all, we have a picture of Jesus weeping over the tomb of Lazarus. “See how He loved him,” say the Jews who see Jesus weeping.

Then we have Jesus saying in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” Lazarus does indeed come forth from the tomb, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Then Jesus says to those who are witnesses to this startling event, “Unbind him and let him go!” That will make your heart beat faster, will it not? “Unbind him and let him go!” It tells us that Jesus is in control.

The story of the raising of Lazarus is a drama of love, new life and freedom. It is representative of the sort of thing that Jesus is continually doing in people’s lives.

There are three ingredients in the story of Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus that are always present at those times in our lives when our balloons are a forlorn wad of wet rubber and we are pleading with God, “Daddy, fix it.”

FIRST OF ALL, WE ARE HEARTENED IN A TIME OF CRISIS BY THE PRESENCE OF THE MASTER.

Mary and Martha called for Jesus and He came. He didn’t come according to their schedule, but He came. He always does when we have a need.

You may know the remarkable story of Sir Ernest Shackleton and his journey to the Antarctic in the first part of the twentieth century. It was Shackleton’s dream to cross the 2100 miles of this wasteland of ice and snow by foot and by dogsled. Unfortunately, his ship was stopped by an ice pack and finally sank. He and his men started out trudging over drifting ice-floes trying to reach the nearest land — nearly 200 miles away, and the nearest human outpost — nearly 1200 miles away. They towed behind them a lifeboat weighing nearly a ton. When they finally reached waters clear enough of ice to navigate they faced waves as high as 90 feet.

Finally—yea, miraculously—they reached South Georgia Island only to discover that they were on the wrong side of the island. They had to cross a 10,000 foot high mountain range that had never been crossed before. The story of that crossing as related in the book, *Endurance*, is an amazing story.

When they finally reached their destination almost seven months after beginning their journey, they were so bedraggled that their friends did not recognize them. But here is what is particularly significant: To a man those who completed the journey reported that they felt the presence of One unseen accompanying them on their perilous trek. Somehow they knew that they were not alone, God was with them.

Jesus promised His disciples that they would never be alone. He would provide them with a Counselor, or a Comforter. The word Paraclete is the Greek word for the presence that Jesus promised. It is an interesting word. It comes from the law courts of the time. The Paraclete was a person of unblemished character. When the evidence had been presented and a verdict was eminent in a court trial, this person of unblemished character, this Paraclete, would simply come and stand with the accused. The power of the Paraclete’s character gave the accused not only comfort, but also moral support in the pursuit of a favorable verdict.

Is this not what the presence of the risen Christ does for us in life’s most difficult trials? We may not see a loved one raised from the dead as Mary and Martha did, but it helps when we are carrying a terrible burden to know that we do not carry it alone. We see here, first of all, the comfort of Jesus’ presence.

IN THE SECOND PLACE, WE ARE HEARTENED IN A TIME OF CRISIS BY CHRIST’S POWER.

Every follower of Jesus Christ needs to understand that Christ has power over both life and death — otherwise we have no news that is ultimately Good News.

John Huffman in his book *Who's In Charge Here?* tells about Robert Dick Wilson, a great professor at Princeton Theological Seminary. One of Dr. Wilson's students had been invited back to preach in Miller Chapel twelve years after his graduation.

Old Dr. Wilson came in and sat down near the front. At the close of the meeting the old professor came up to his former student, cocked his head to one side in his characteristic way, extended his hand, and said, "If you come back again, I will not come to hear you preach. I only come once. I am glad that you are a big-godder. When my boys come back, I come to see if they are big-godders or little-godders, and then I know what their ministry will be."

His former student asked him to explain, and he replied: "Well, some men have a little god, and they are always in trouble with him. He can't do any miracles. He can't take care of the inspiration and transmission of the Scripture to us. He doesn't intervene on behalf of his people. They have a little god and I call them little-godders. Then there are those who have a great God. He speaks and it is done. He commands and it stands fast. He knows how to show Himself strong on behalf of them that fear Him. You have a great God; and He will bless your ministry." He paused a moment and smiled, and said, "God bless you," and turned, and walked out.

You might want to ask yourself whether you have a big God or a little god.

A little girl listened attentively as her father read the family devotions. She seemed awed by her parents' talk of God's limitless power and mercy. "Daddy," she asked, placing her little hands on his knees, "how big is God?"

Her father thought for a moment and answered, "Darling, He is always just a little bigger than you need." Her father gave a wise answer. God is always a bigger than our need.

In the years 1014-1035 there ruled over England a Danish king named Canute. King Canute tired of hearing his retainers seek to flatter him with extravagant praises of his greatness, power and invincibility. So one day he arranged a demonstration to quiet this nonsense. He ordered his chair to be set down on the seashore. Then he commanded the waves not to come in and wet him. However, no matter how forcefully he ordered the tide not to come in, his order was not obeyed. Soon the waves lapped around his chair. One historian tells us that, therefore, he never wore his crown again, but hung it on a statue of the crucified Christ.

Maybe you and I need to try that the next time we go to the beach. We have finite power. We have only the most tenuous hold on existence. But there is One who holds existence itself in the palm of His hand. "Lazarus, come forth," Christ commanded, and Lazarus came forth! So let me ask you, is your Christ big enough to have accomplished that? We are heartened by His presence and by His power.

FINALLY, WE ARE HEARTENED IN A TIME OF CRISIS BY HIS ETERNAL PURPOSE.

Our Old Testament lesson is from the book of Ezekiel. The Spirit of the Lord showed Ezekiel a valley filled with dry bones. The Spirit said to Ezekiel, “Son of man, can these bones live?” The answer was that, of course, they can live again. God can take that which is dead, that which is but dust and ashes, that which seems utterly without hope, and reconstruct, rebuild, re-animate, rekindle, revive. Nothing is impossible to an omnipotent God.

Then God revealed to Ezekiel that the dry bones represented Israel. It was God’s purpose to make a new covenant with His people, to rebuild and rekindle their hopes as a people. You see, Ezekiel knew about God’s power. What he needed to understand was God’s loving and faithful purpose. When we come to a time of crisis, we too know God’s power. We know God can fix any problem. The question that often comes to us is whether God is concerned about our particular situation. And the answer is that God is.

The picture of Jesus weeping beside the tomb of Lazarus is such an important and unforgettable portrait. It allows us a look into the eyes of our Father. St. Paul tells us in Romans 8 that this is the eternal purpose of God, that nothing can ever separate us from His love. That is what we need to know. That is comfort to the breaking heart. The Father cares when His children are in pain.

This, then, is the Good News from the story of Mary and Martha, and their brother Lazarus to all those whose lives are a forlorn wad of wet rubber lying on a church hall floor. God is a Father who can fix any situation. He is aware of our needs, and will always do that which is to our best good.

A woman once wrote to Catholic Digest to tell about her six-year-old grandson. Their pastor had died. A retired priest was temporarily serving as a replacement. One day he announced that the bishop would soon be sending the church a new young priest directly from the seminary. When her grandson heard this announcement, he told his parents that when the new priest came he would no longer be going to Mass.

“What are you talking about?” his parents wanted to know. The young boy replied, “When they get priests directly from the cemetery, I’m staying home.”

Obviously that young boy wanted nothing to do with a zombie apocalypse, in the modern vernacular. Of course the young priest did not come from a cemetery, but from a seminary. Only Lazarus was given the gift of returning from a cemetery, and that was only temporary. Jesus had His cemetery experience, but God raised Him as He raised Lazarus. But for Jesus it was not a temporary experience. He was raised and lives forever at the right hand of the Father.

Our news for the day comes from a cemetery, and it is, indeed, good news. Whatever our need is, God can fix it! Christ is alive and we can experience His presence, His power and His eternal purpose when we place our faith in Him! Amen!!!

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