

## Lent 5(a) 2020 Derby Cathedral.

After that long Gospel reading ([John 11.1-45](#)) of Jesus raising of Lazarus, my mind springs to an occasion when apparently St Francis got up to preach, looked at the expectant faces before him and said, 'God has given me nothing to say to you.' And with that, he blessed the people and sat down again. Before getting your hopes up too high, you'll be only too aware that I'm not St Francis, and I am going to share a few words with you, although our Gospel, along with the reading from Ezekiel, could quite easily stand on their own because they offer powerful vivid images of life coming out of death.

In that Old Testament passage, the picture is of a valley of dry bones, brought about through the ravages of war, with the skeletal remains of bodies left strewn across the battlefield; there seems to be no-one left to take them away & give them a decent burial; it's a desolate sight.

In our Gospel, too, Jesus was facing a situation of death and decay. His friend Lazarus has died, his body is beginning to smell, his loved ones are full of grief.

And we read that when Jesus witnessed Mary's pain and that of those with her, he, too, began to weep. It may strike us as odd that the person who was about to raise Lazarus to new life, should be shedding tears at his death and the grieving of those around him. But I think there's something in it. The possibility for new life, on whatever level we consider it, depends, in part, on our capacity or willingness to grieve and let go. And so it is a grieving Jesus who goes to the tomb;

but it is also a grieving Jesus who in faith and hope believes that the love of his Father is stronger than death, and can say with confidence, 'Lazarus, come out'.

As we wrestle with our present crisis, we may well be wondering where **we** find hope.

I have a sense that an initial step towards it could be in acknowledging how much loss & grief are caught up in our current struggles. We, too, like Christ, need to allow time to grieve; to take on board that our usual ways of living are being lost to us; even more

painfully, to recognise that some people will be lost to us, or perhaps have already been lost to us.

And also to realise that when we emerge from this crisis, however long that takes, life is unlikely to simply return to normal; things will have changed, it will be different for many of us, perhaps for all of us, and for some it will be very different, and very difficult. If, though, amidst all of the uncertainty, we are able to bring our grief into the presence of one who grieves with us, hope does become a real possibility.

In fact, one could argue that we've already been starting to see small hopeful signs in different ways; people prising through & beyond anxieties about their own needs, & reaching out to their neighbours, especially those who are most vulnerable. Small acts of kindness, a card or email or telephone call here, a donation to the foodbank or a delivery to the housebound there, & of course, not losing sight of the heroic efforts of medical and other front line staff in a risk ridden context.

All of these are indications that, in the midst of grief, we are responding to the voice of one who calls us, as he did to Lazarus, to 'come out'; to be freed from the cloths that binds us, looking beyond the darkness of our fears & insecurities, & walking towards the light. They are signs that, like Ezekiel's dry bones, we are allowing new life to be breathed into us, marking the real possibility for a renewal in community living, in which everyone matters, and in which there can be hope for us all.

*Adam Dickens*