

*Sermon for Fifth Sunday in Lent – March 22, 2026*

God be with you all.

In the readings for today, this final Sunday in Lent before Palm Sunday and Easter, we hear multiple accounts of death and hope. Lessons that tell us even where there is death and suffering and mourning, there is new life and hope in Christ.

We hear from the prophet Ezekiel about an extremely powerful experience in the dry and parched desert. Ezekiel is taken out in the middle of nowhere and sees bones all around him. He is told by God to prophesy, and as he prophesies and watches, he hears a loud rattling. Then God takes the bones and restores them of their muscle and flesh. Then Ezekiel prophesies more, and breath from the four winds enters into the bodies. God restores the people, and we see that even where there is barrenness and death, there is new life in God.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul gives us a different sense of death and resurrection. Paul writes that the flesh is death and the Spirit is life. Our flesh or our earthly desires, ultimately turn us away from God. Because it takes our mind away from the Spirit, who residing in us, gives us life and peace. Paul says that our bodies are dead from sin, but we have life through the Spirit. Even where there is death, there is new life in God.

Finally, the Gospel reading for today, possibly one of my favourite stories in all of scripture, tells the story of Lazarus, a friend of Jesus. Lazarus dies while Jesus is away teaching. Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, send word and ask Jesus to come back. Jesus purposefully takes more time than necessary getting back to Bethany, and the two sisters are mad at Jesus. They tell Jesus that if He had only come sooner, Lazarus would still be alive. Jesus, knowing that what they are saying is true, shows what seems like a sense of frustration, and tells them “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” Jesus goes to the tomb of Lazarus, and shouts for him to come out and he does.

At this point, maybe it is a bit of cliché, but that line that simply says, “Jesus began to weep.” Mary and others from the community come up to Him weeping, and the text tells us that when He sees this, “He was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.” This is a moment where we see Christ’s humanity on full display and is not nearly as comical as something like a nap in a boat. The excerpt begins with Jesus’s trademark grumpiness at lack of belief and ends up with him standing with Mary and the other friends of Lazarus, weeping with them.

The Lord knows we have so much in the world to weep about. In our own lives we love and witness people struggling through things like mental health issues and terminal illness. In our community, there are people are people struggling through things like addiction, homelessness, violence, and extreme poverty. And in our world, we see all these things repeated on a nauseating scale. Famines, both climate change and politically imposed. People who are enslaved and forced to work in cobalt mines so that those of us in the global North can have cellphones, computers, and electric vehicles. People being violently forced from their homes and murdered by the thousands like in Palestine. And so many wars...

Wars to keep the weapons manufacturers rich, to keep politicians smug, and to forcefully take things like oil and other resources. Wars that have the harshest impact on the lowest among us. Those who need gas to get to work to feed their kids, but with rising prices are desperate. Those who could not imagine groceries being any more expensive, because they are already at their limit. So, again, I say, Lord you know how much there is to weep about.

We sometimes live in a culture where our weeping is not allowed or is looked down upon. Why worry about that loved one suffering when you need to get back to work? Why worry about people starving and suffering on the other side of the world when you have assignments to finish? Why weep about rent and grocery and gas prices making life inaccessible when all you have to do is pull yourself up and work harder? Jesus, in His frustration about their lack of belief, tells Mary and Martha something similar in a nicer way. “Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” Believe and everything will be okay; there’s no need to worry.

But even Jesus, God incarnate, who did plan to delay going back and to let Lazarus die, stands with Mary, Martha, and their community and is so overcome with emotion that He weeps... Even Jesus, who is moments away from moving the stone and shouting for Lazarus to come out, is so deeply moved by the death of His friend and the mourning of others that He weeps... If even Jesus, the Dawn from on High, the Truth, the Way, the Resurrection, and the Life weeps, then we can be forgiven our weeping. We can accept and love our weeping. It connects us with God and one another through intimate shared experience...

I don't want to leave it on that note, though. Yes, we are in Lent and need to have deep spiritual reflection, but the weeping is not all there is. Even when it feels like it.

Recently, pastor Lyndon was being interviewed about a church sign on a CBC Radio show. At one point, the interviewer asks him the question, "what would Jesus say about the world today?" His response was that there would be a deep sense of lament, while pointing to a hopefulness in the resurrection looking forward to Easter. I think that is very wise. We hear the same in the readings today. In a barren place full of the evidence of death, God returns flesh to bones and breathes new life into them. Paul writes that even when we are giving in to things that turn us away from God, Christ is within us and makes us new. And in the Gospel, even when there is death and mourning and weeping, there is life in Jesus.

It is not easy to see and feel the hope. In his *Treatise on Good Works* from 1520, Luther writes "Given that in such works, faith is still paltry and weak, let us inquire further about cases when people suffer with respect to their body, property, reputation, friends, or anything else. Do they then believe they are still pleasing to God and—be their suffering and adversity great or small—that God is still mercifully disposed toward them? In this situation, when all our senses and understanding tell us that God is angry, it is an art to trust in God and to regard oneself as better cared for than it appears." It is an art and a challenge to be able to see God's love and mercy in times of weeping and despair. But even when it feels impossible to see, it is there.

May we continue to support one another like Mary and Martha, may we accept the weeping of ourselves and one another, and may we feel God's overflowing mercy and love as we look towards and trust in the promise of the resurrection. Amen.