



Resources for Parish Worship

In this last week of Lent, we are given a prophecy of the resurrection to come for Christ. But, before Jesus can get to the glory, there is a lot of suffering and sacrifice to be endured.

Through Lent we have been called to journey with Jesus, to learn the steps of God's life-dance from him, and we are not stopping now. It's a challenging call, but, if we are to join Christ in his resurrection, we must also journey with him through the cross. Yet, even as we face the struggles and sacrifices of following Jesus, we will always find these moments of glory that sustain and strengthen us.

May our hearts be strengthened and prepared, and may we embrace both the glory and the sacrifice of our faith as we worship this week.

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

Ezekiel 37:1-14: Ezekiel's prophesy of restoration in which he sees a valley of dry bones, and is called by God to prophesy that the bones come together and be clothed again in flesh, and then that the wind/breath/Spirit blow into them and bring them alive. In this way, he proclaims, God will bring life and restoration to God's exiled people.

Psalms 130: A plea for mercy to God, with assurance that God does not keep a record of sins, but forgives, restores and rescues.

Romans 8:6-11: God's Spirit, and the spiritual attitude that it nurtures, leads to life, and will enliven us not just in our spirits, but in our bodies as well.

John 11:1-45: Jesus, on hearing of Lazarus' illness, returns after a short delay, to Judea, risking his own death, in order to raise Lazarus. After

proclaiming himself as “the resurrection and the life” he raises Lazarus, and many people believe in him as a result.

[Click here to view the readings](#)

http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Ezekiel%2037:%201-14%0Acw%20Psalm%20130%0ARomans%208:%206-11%0AJohn%2011:%201-45

LECTIONARY NOTES 1

EZEKIEL 37:1-14: Ezekiel was a prophet to the people of Israel in exile in Babylon. They were as devoid of political hope and possibility for national restoration as the field of dead bones of the slain shown him by the Lord. God directed Ezekiel to breathe life into the people in exile with the promises of his word. The comparison is reminiscent of God breathing into the nostrils of the first man to make him a living creature. The change to a picture of future opened graves gives promise that in the future the nation will be returned to its 'own soil', namely in Jerusalem and Israel. They will know thereby that the Lord has spoken.

ROMANS 8:6-11: Christ has met the complete requirement of God's law which God had rightly demanded of all people. Believers in Christ have in this way been set free from the law of sin and death. Therefore no believing Christian can set his or her mind on the things of the 'flesh', ie sinful pleasures and evil which belong to the old sinful nature. Those things militate destructively against the Spirit's indwelling. Even though a Christian is still afflicted bodily by sin, yet the life of the Spirit imparts life, just as the Spirit raised Jesus from the dead.

JOHN 11:1-45: The high point in this miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead is the revelation of Jesus as Son of God and the Messiah. The proof of this brought to a head the fanatical opposition of the religious leaders which resulted not long afterwards in his arrest, trial and execution in Jerusalem. While his full humanity is prominently evident in his emotional response to the grief of Mary, Martha and their friends, his divinity is manifested above all other considerations. He is seen to have foreknowledge of Lazarus's death and what he would do to glorify God. Jesus teaches clearly that there is everlasting life through believing in him. He proves this by raising a body already into the stage of decomposition.

LECTIONARY NOTES 2

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

The readings for Lent 5 are a prophecy. As we prepare to move into Holy Week, the transition point this week is a focus on resurrection. God's people are given a vision of resurrection through Ezekiel. The Psalmist recognises God's grace, mercy and rescue, and Paul proclaims that God's Spirit gives us life in our whole being. John's Gospel, also in a prophetic narrative, describes the raising of Lazarus, and demonstrates that Jesus is the one in whom life and resurrection is found. So, as we prepare our hearts for the coming journey through Jesus' passion, we are reminded in advance that death does not have the last word, and that resurrection is promised and experienced in the midst of pain, threat and death. Jesus does not shy from the threat of death, but offers himself as the one who brings life, even though he will ultimately die. And, yet, there is the hope, proclaimed even by Jesus himself, that he, as the forerunner, will be raised, assuring us that our resurrection is also certain. It's a celebratory theme this week, but also a challenge to not shy away from the forces of death and evil, but to confront them – in ourselves and in our world – in the hope of resurrection.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: This week I find myself reflecting on the work of Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., and how the dream of justice, of resurrection for their people, enabled them to embrace the deaths, the suffering, of working toward that resurrection. Jesus did not shy away from his death, and even Thomas, while doubting the hope of resurrection, gave himself to die with the Saviour in their journey to raise Lazarus. In the same way, in the work for justice, especially in terms of the massive human rights issues – human trafficking, violence against women and children, poverty, inclusion of gay people and immigration – we need to find the courage to embrace the persecution, the attacks on our reputation, and even physical harm – as we work to bring life and dignity to all others. The cost is often frightening, and yet, the cross is what we are called to bear, and our hope is that after the cost, we will nevertheless find life and joy – that is the hope of resurrection that continues to drive us and empower us. So, if we take the call and the hope seriously, we need to reflect on how we can engage with those who oppose and threaten us, and how we can deliberately and visibly bring life to those for whom we strive. And, as we lay down our lives, we must remain mindful of the signs of resurrection that are always around us.

LOCAL APPLICATION: For every follower of Christ, and every Christian community, resurrection is both a promise and a challenge. It is a promise that opens us to God's life which inspires and empowers us every moment. It

is a challenge not to shy away from the sacrifices and struggles that we will inevitably face as we work for life and justice in our world. Daily we are called to lay down our own comfort and embrace simplicity for the sake of those who are poor. We are called to think carefully about what we buy and where, what we eat and how much, and how we do business for the sake of those who face oppressive trade restrictions and unfair exploitation by the wealthy and powerful. In our own relationships we are called to give up our need to be right, our need to protect ourselves and our fear of those who are different and 'alien' to us, in order to bring life and grace to those who need it. Even our worship calls us to lay down our own preferences in favour of others so that they may encounter God in the way that is most helpful and transforming for them, rather than fighting for our own preferred styles and forms. All of this sacrifice can only be done if we truly believe in and embrace the promise of resurrection – for ourselves, that we will be lead to life, and for our world, that our small contribution will make the world a more whole and alive place. In what ways can you embrace a small sacrifice this week in order to bring life to another?

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

We beseech thee, Almighty God,
look upon the hearty desires of thy humble servants,
and stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty,
to be our defence against all our enemies;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect Two

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ
delivered and saved the world:
Grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross,
we may triumph in the power of his victory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God is more ready to hear our prayers than we are to utter them.

Let us pray for other people.

Source of life, God of love, let your salvation surround the living who walk under the shadow of death and the dead who are gloriously alive.

Great Spirit-Friend,
Come with your life and light.

Be close to your dying children. By simple faith in your undying grace may they have peace in the hour of their departing.

Great Spirit-Friend,
Come with your life and light.

Be close to people who caught up in the rawness of a new grief. Enable them to weep well, free from bitterness or despair.

Great Spirit-Friend,
Come with your life and light.

Be close to all who care for the dying; in hospitals or at home, in a hospice or on a battlefield; give them your quiet strength.

Great Spirit-Friend,
Come with your life and light.

Be close to ministers, priests and lay pastors, who pray with the dying, minister last rites, or sit holding a hand.

Great Spirit-Friend,
Come with your life and light.

Be close to those who fight against untimely death. Those who spend their days working for the elimination of cancer, aids, many diseases; the carnage on our highways, and the butchery of warfare.

Great Spirit-Friend,
Come with your life and light.

Be close to the preachers of the gospel of peace. By your tireless Spirit, may inadequate words take flesh and become powerful agents in helping people to begin living eternal life now. *Through Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Amen!

POST COMMUNION

God of hope,
in this eucharist we have tasted
the promise of your heavenly banquet
and the richness of eternal life.
May we who bear witness to the death of your Son,

also proclaim the glory of his resurrection,
for he is Lord for ever and ever.

Most merciful God,
you saved humankind
by the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ.
Through this sacrament,
strengthen our faith in him who suffered on the cross,
so that we may triumph in the power of his victory.
For he lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

PRAYERS

Almighty God,
you alone can bring into order
the unruly wills and affections of sinners:
Grant your people grace
to love what you command and desire what you promise;
that, among the swift and varied changes of the world,
our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.
1979 Book of Common Prayer

God of wilderness and water,
your Son was baptized and tempted as we are.
Guide us through this season,
that we may not avoid struggle,
but open ourselves to blessing,
through the cleansing depths of repentance
and the heaven-rending words of the Spirit. Amen.

Artist of souls,
you sculpted a people for yourself
out of the rocks of wilderness and fasting.
Help us as we take up your invitation to prayer and simplicity,
that the discipline of these forty days
may sharpen our hunger for the feast of your holy friendship,
and whet our thirst for the living water you offer

through Jesus Christ. Amen.

God of the covenant,
in the glory of the cross
your Son embraced the power of death
and broke its hold over your people.
In this time of repentance,
draw all people to yourself,
that we who confess Jesus as Lord
may put aside the deeds of death
and accept the life of your kingdom. Amen.

God of the living,
through baptism we pass from the shadow of death
to the light of the resurrection.
Remain with us and give us hope
that, rejoicing in the gift of the Spirit
who gives life to our mortal flesh,
we may be clothed with the garment of immortality,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sisters and brothers,
as Jesus, in the days before his passion,
offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears,
let us pray for those who suffer, those who are in need,
and those who seek reconciliation.
God of compassion,
you know our faults and yet you promised to forgive.
Keep us in your presence and give us your wisdom.
Open our hearts to gladness,
call dry bones to dance,
and restore to us the joy of your salvation. Amen.

God of all consolation and compassion,
your Son comforted the grieving sisters, Martha and Mary;
your breath alone brings life
to dry bones and weary souls.
Pour out your Spirit upon us,
that we may face despair and death
with the hope of resurrection
and faith in the One
who called Lazarus forth from the grave. Amen.

Loving God our Father, we see your compassion revealed in the tears of Jesus for Lazarus his friend. Look today upon the distress of your church, mourning and praying for your children dead in their sins. By the power of your Spirit call them back to life. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON OUTLINE 1

John 11:1-45 Now a certain man was ill....

We travel in heart and mind to *Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha* – frequent refuge for Jesus...

1. The Sick Friend 1-17: *Lazarus was ill v1 - ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.'* It was dangerous for Jesus to go - ⁸*The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?'* Still, Jesus went – after a deliberate delay and arrived late - *When Jesus arrived, v17 he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.*

2. The Sorrowing Family -18-40: naturally grief-stricken...

a) Mourners - *many of the Jews had come to console them...*

b) Martha - *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died v21* – natural reaction and faith in Jesus...

c) Mary – same response/confidence in Jesus v32...

d) Jesus - *was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved - ³⁵Jesus began to weep* – distressing occasion for them all... ³⁶*So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!'*

3. The Saving Faith 41-45:- as Jesus performs a mighty miracle & raises Lazarus to life: *he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' ⁴⁴The 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.'* Thus Jesus demonstrated his power & the truth of his words v25:- *'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'* Note the response - v45 *Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.* So may we too have a living faith in Him....

By Norman Porteous

SERMON

An entire industry has evolved in our culture to market something called "spirituality," as if it is a commodity we can purchase, or that there is some body of knowledge about the spirit that can be somehow learned and appropriated.

By the Rev. Kirk Alan Kubicek

We talk a lot about God and Jesus, but rarely do we take much time to talk about the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost. And yet, an entire industry has evolved in our culture to market something called "spirituality," as if it is a commodity we can purchase, or that there is some body of knowledge about the spirit that can be somehow learned and appropriated. As a friend of mine once said, "You cannot fit the Spirit into a flow chart!"

Watch the snow fall. Each flake born upon the wind. Each flake dances through the air, taking no straight lines, to land just where the wind means to place it. Then remember the words Jesus spoke about the Spirit a few weeks ago when talking with Nicodemus. The spirit is like the wind. We cannot see it, only the effect it has on things like trees and leaves and hats and umbrellas. We know not where it comes from, says Jesus, and we know not where it is going.

So it is, says Jesus, with the spirit.

This Spirit dimension of God is by its very nature at least somewhat unpredictable. Makes one wonder why we desire so much "spirituality." We tend to want to know where we are going before we agree to go anywhere. In the Bible, the Hebrew and Greek words used for Spirit mean breath or wind: *ruach* and *pneuma*. This wind or breath of God is there at the very beginning of Genesis, at the beginning of creation. Nothing has life apart from this breath, this Holy Wind. We hear it rustling around a pile of dry bones in Ezekiel, bringing a people who were out of energy and *inspiration* – literally "to breath in" – while in exile, slowly but deliberately stirring them back to life.

And the life of the early church is depicted in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles as being a people who are blown on by the wind and sent to wherever God needs them to do whatever God needs them to do. It is always surprising and new.

So it is with this story of Lazarus. He has been dead for four whole days. In the tomb, wrapped up, dead and gone. While he is sick, his sisters Martha and Mary call for Jesus to come. It is surprising that Jesus, who we are told

loves Lazarus and his sisters, does not hurry right over there. The Spirit of God has other plans, unlikely plans, plans that seemingly make no sense.

We desperately want things to make sense. We want to understand the Spirit so life makes sense. But Spirit is not concerned with making sense. Spirit is seemingly concerned with making new life – and making life new.

Surely no one expected Jesus to arrive after Lazarus had died. Surely no one expected him to stand outside the tomb and weep. Surely no one expected him to ask God for help. Surely no one expected him to call into the tomb, “Lazarus, come out!” And surely no one expected the dead man to come out. Just as no one expected the man blind from birth to see. Just as no one expected Jesus to talk with a Samaritan woman, or to hear news of a coming anointed one from such a woman.

And least of all do we expect Martha, the practical sister, the one who sets and clears tables while Mary sits at the master’s feet, to be the one, the first one in John’s gospel to proclaim, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.”

That should be Mary’s line. And we are also surprised to hear that it is Thomas, the one who throughout the history of the church is to be called “doubting,” who was the one disciple that, after they all acknowledge that to return anywhere near Jerusalem was to risk being stoned to death, suddenly proclaimed, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” How surprising that the doubting one turns out to be the courageous and believing one.

None of it seems to make sense. None of it seems to hold together. So it is with the life of the Spirit. You cannot fit the Spirit into a flow chart.

The practice of yoga is also concerned with spirit and breath. Yoga recognizes that we breathe in the spirit of life and calls us to be attentive to our breathing at all times in all places in all circumstances. Tich Naht Hanh, the revered Vietnamese Buddhist says, “We can be extremely happy just sitting and breathing in and out. We don’t have to do or achieve anything. We enjoy the miracle of simply being here.”

Jesus says Spirit, God’s breath, God’s wind, God’s life-giving spirit, is necessary to go with him that we might die with him. That we might die to our preconceived notions of the Spirit-filled life. That we might die to predictability and be open to newness and surprise. That we might even die to our preconceived notions of Jesus and be open to the surprising new things he says and does.

It seems that, like Lazarus, we tend to want to keep our precious ideas about Jesus entombed as if somehow they will last forever. When we all do this, the

life of the church and the life of the Spirit wither and die. The Spirit calls us to roll away the stones from our tombs, unbind him, and let Jesus go. Only when we roll away the stones, unbind him, and let him go, can we be free. Free to follow him wherever he leads.

So we come here week after week to take breathing lessons. We resist change and newness and surprises, but we know deep down inside that we need this breath, this wind, this spirit of God to breathe on us and to breathe through us. We know somewhere inside that we are *imago Dei*, created in God's image, and we are meant to be blown upon by the wind like the snow, and sent to places and people we do not yet know.

That is why it is so important that we come back here week after week after week: so that we can *inspire* – “breathe in” – the Holy Spirit, so that we can share the Spirit, so that we can take breathing lessons, so that we can share the love of God, the breath of God, and the Spirit of God with one another and then with the whole world.

Spirit is an invitation to a life of surprise, a life of new things, a life of new ways of doing things, a life of new ways of knowing God, a life of new ways of seeing others, a life of new ways of being with others and ourselves. Spirit seeks to bring us closer to God, closer to others, and closer to ourselves. It is a way of letting go and letting God.

“Make Us as the Snow,” by the Rev. Kirk Alan Kubicek

The snow falls

As if it knows where it is landing,

As if it has direction, purpose,

As if it has been sent

Then blows the wind

Redirecting each flake

Re-routing each crystal

So that suddenly

Without prior notice

Each lands

Just there

And nowhere else

So it is he says

With spirit

For you

For me

For us

And yet

We feel so sure

So certain
So determined
We continue to kid ourselves
Into thinking
That we know
Where we are going
Come, Holy Ghost,
Our souls inspire
Make us as the snow

— *The Rev. Kirk Alan Kubicek is co-rector of [Saint Peter's Episcopal Church](#) at Ellicott Mills, Ellicott City, Maryland, a parish in the Anglo-Catholic tradition. He is also chaplain and teaches at Saint Timothy's School for girls, the diocesan girls' boarding school in the Diocese of Maryland.*

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

"The Road to Easter Runs through a Cemetery," the Rev. Dr. Wiley Stephens,
Day 1

http://day1.org/2756-the_road_to_easter_runs_through_a_cemetery

"Unbind Him and Let Him Go!" the Very Rev. Samuel G. Candler, *Day 1*

http://day1.org/1086-unbind_him_and_let_him_go

"Whenever Jesus Shows Up," the Rev. Dr. Wiley Stephens, *Day 1*

A man left church complaining under his breath, "Fine, all this talk about green pastures and still waters. But what about the droughts? What about the storms? What about the crushing pressure and defeats? What then?"

Our Gospel reminds us that Jesus still shows up and Jesus makes a difference.

http://day1.org/929-whenEVER_jesus_shows_up

Out of the depths: Starting with the quotation from the Psalm, "Out of the depths I have called to you O Lord", the link to the Gospel is made: "Out of the depths they called to Jesus. Mary and Martha were in dire straits. The way they'd been living was in many ways exactly in tune with Jesus' radical call; they lived with their brother Lazarus and remained remained "unattached," a path that gave them a great deal of freedom, including the freedom to be extravagantly generous, as Mary was when she poured out ointment worth a year's wages for many onto Jesus' feet."

There is a moving quotation from a mother whose child has died - it is almost a modern psalm. The conclusion leads to the resurrection via the thought, "When we cry out from the depths, God hears. When Jesus seems slow in coming, he is coming nonetheless. And if we worry that it is too late, Jesus shows that it is never too late."

http://www.sarahlaughed.net/lectionary/2005/03/fifth_sunday_in.html

The fear of death: Sermon based on Ezekiel's vision deals with people's fear of death. When a baby is born, and lies in its adoring mother's arms, there is only one prediction about that child that we can make with absolute certainty: It shall die.

Death is our universal fate. It is the fate of individuals, families and nations. When Ezekiel had his extraordinary experience of a valley filled with human bones, it was the death of the Jewish people that he was seeing. His people were either dead or dying: decimated by conquering armies, a few surviving in a ravaged countryside, a few thousand surviving as captives in a far land. He saw the death of his people, the death of hope.

"We all have a basic fear of death, genetically passed down from our distant ancestors. I don't believe people who claim that death in no way disturbs them. Just put them in a doctor's consulting room, and watch them being told that they cancer or aids, and you will see the veneer crack". From this all too realistic start the sermon develops to the action of Jesus - "In the story, Jesus backs up this message with the word of command. Standing in front of the tomb, Jesus cries: "Lazarus come out!" And the dead man came out, his hands and feet trailing the burial clothes, and a napkin still across his face." 'This story was very precious to the early Christians. Jesus was not only raised from the dead on Easter Day, but with him came the promise that we too would be raised. "*Because I live, you shall live also.*"

<http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocA/24LENT5.htm>

CHILDREN

[Worshiping with Children](#), Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown

<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2011/03/year-the-fifth-sunday-in-lent-april-10.html>

[Does God Recycle?](#), Anna Shirey, *Anna's Hosannas*, Children's Lesson

<http://annashosannas.net/Lent-5A.php>

[Story for Children's Worship and Family Activity](#), Lent 5, at *word-sunday.com*:
A Catholic Resource for the Lectionary by Larry Broding.
<http://www.word-sunday.com/index.html>

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

[Breathe On Me Breath Of God](#)

[Hark My Soul! It Is The Lord](#)

[And Can It Be](#)

[Saviour, Thy Dying Love](#)

[Christ For The World We Sing](#)

[Above All](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

Here I Am, Jesus: [Chord Chart](#); [Mp3 Preview](#)

[Breathe](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[Lifesong](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[May The Words Of My Mouth](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[O The Wonderful Cross](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)