

The Anglican Church of St Philip's O'Connor, Canberra, ACT, Australia
Services on Sunday: Holy Communion 8am and 10am. Wednesday 10am

Priest:(the Rev'd) Rob Lamerton. Ph 62478004, Fax 62307775, E-mail: stphil@acay.com.au
Wardens: Chris Cheah, Janine Studholme, Devin Combs Bowles

13th March 2005. Lent Five

Rob Lamerton

Readings:

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 130 (APBA p.364)

Romans 8:6-11

John 11:1-45

What do we make of this story? (The long gospel reading of Jesus and Lazarus)

Do we read it literally

OR is it a metaphor telling us that Christ brings life to even the most desperate situations.

I must admit sometimes at funerals I wish I had the ability to restore life.

When I hear this story I think of situations like the Thredbo landslide and the rescue of Stuart Diver buried under tons of rubble and presumed dead. He was trapped from Wed 30th July 1997 to Sat 2nd August and then it took ten hours to get him out.

I think too of the stories of people buried after earthquakes — recently in Iran a child buried for days — after the Tsunami, people found buried or washed up miles away, or floating on rafts or trees hundreds of kilometers away.

— People prepared for burial or in morgues who cough and are found to be alive
As good as dead — but alive!

But in each case needing the help and intervention of outside help to be fully restored.

Then I thought of the many times people say after illness or grief or depression or trauma — I feel alive again!

I recall a song from the sixties (*that's the NINETEEN SIXTIES!*) called "I'm Alive" by a group called The Hollies — I seem to recall it was one of those about a breaking story — broken hearts and all that!
So... I thought I would look it up on the web.

Well there was no mention of the Hollies, but I got stacks of other songs and singers with similar words: Seal, Jackson Brown, Celine Dion, Jennifer Love Hewitt, Uriah Heep...

Then oddly in a song on the radio these words appeared:

"Got an Englishman to walk on my spine
brought me strangely alive"

Songs were about the excitement of being in love or meeting someone who brought new life into our world. Not talking about being **actually** dead, but about not being **fully alive** and finding the key, the catalyst, the person, to intervene...

In our gospel story today, Jesus is the one who intervenes, who has sufficient faith and hope to have the stone removed and to call out "Lazarus, Come Out."

We don't know if Lazarus was dead, although in this story every one including Jesus believed he was dead.

Even if he was not dead — to leave him there would have sealed his fate.

Physical death indicates separation from God or spiritual death. Dry bones in Ezekiel's story indicate a spiritual life well past its use by date.

The relationship the people of Israel have with God is at a point almost NOT worth restoring.

Can these bones live? Says the Lord.

O Lord God, you know! says Ezekiel — the answer lies with God.

But for God's word to be heard it has to have some human intervention and Ezekiel is called to prophesy to these bones and say: "O Dry bones — hear the word of the Lord."

the vision; the bones come together / sinews/flesh / skin / — BODIES but there was no breath / no life until the breath of God was breathed into them. VISION of the restoration of God's people from defeat, destruction, captivity and spiritual death...

Points to the truth that we can be flesh and blood — but still deny or black out — still NOT be fully alive — We need God's spirit breathed within us!

Paul depicts people who are flesh and blood, alive physically — BUT dead spiritually...

(BAPTISM)

"Life and Peace come from setting one's mind on the spirit"

When our humanity is enlivened by God's spirit, we discover that we are truly alive. Can happen in all sorts of ways — God intervenes in and through people.

But it can also involve an awareness of our smallness, our shortcomings (what we call sin) and the overwhelming Grace of God to restore, heal and enliven.

Every **little** sign of

healing

forgiveness

growing stronger

growing confidence

growth in prayer

is a step in the process of Coming Alive to God.

The story of Lazarus is about Christ bringing life to a situation of death.