Passion Sunday – Ezekiel 37:1-14 & John 11:1-45

‘Then Jesus came to the tomb […and] said, “Take away the stone.” […] So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The 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.”’ *(John 11:38-44)*

At a time when we can hardly believe the new ‘normal’ of life, although it is very unusual a story like that of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead may not seem so surreal. Of course, if we had a choice, we might all sign up for a reversal of our own death, especially those of us who are still young or young at heart. It is never easy to lose a loved one, and with restrictions on the way funerals are carried out, it is even more difficult at this time. Lazarus’ sisters had buried him according to the custom of the day and they knew that death was irreversible. When Jesus came to the tomb and saw their distress, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He knew about his own death approaching; he even knew why and how. He wasn’t ill; he wasn’t old; he was not seeking death, yet he knew that his death was to fulfil a unique and special purpose, for the good of humankind. He also knew and trusted in the power of God, the Father.

But what does it all mean? The other reading for today is from Ezekiel 37, when the prophet Ezekiel is shown a vision of a valley of dry bones over which a prophesy is declared and the bones are dressed with flesh and brought back to life. The vision was a message from God, who said that he would give new life to his people who were suffering in exile. So how do the stories from Ezekiel and John’s Gospel speak to our own situation and the life of the church in our own time? What kind of exile are we in today? And what about life after death? First of all, these stories speak about hope and faith. They are witnesses to the truth of love and grace. Secondly, they teach us something about the limits of our own self-sufficiency. These stories help us turn away from the issue and toward something, somebody, bigger than ourselves. It may be difficult to acknowledge, and a surprise to some, but human beings are not in control of every aspect of our existence! Our time on earth is limited, and we have a calling to do as best we can in it; not just for ourselves, as if life were a string of selfish entertainments, but for ‘the other’, who is our neighbour. Faith in Jesus as God’s Son, who rose from the dead after he had been crucified, gives us hope for the future: that even when life on earth ends, we may rejoice in life in heaven, where there is no more death, and where God himself wipes away every tear from our eyes. *(Revelation 7:17)* As in the day of the Bible, when people were struggling in their life-limiting situations, sometimes to gruesome proportions, God is saying also today to his people: fear not, for I am with you. Have faith and I will give you hope. Accept my grace and receive my peace. Do we think that God doesn’t know about afflictions? Jesus suffered an unprecedented death, and he was God’s Son. He also suffered loneliness and a form of self-isolation. He endured threats, abuse, ridicule, fatigue, hunger and thirst. The stories of Lazarus and the valley of bones are introductions to the main story of God: that he ‘loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.’ *(John 3:16)* It’s the story that has been a comfort to the church in all ages and in all circumstances. It’s the story of Love and of Hope. In Faith, then, may the Peace of the Lord Jesus always be with you.

*Astrid*