

BENEFICE OF CARTERTON AND BRIZE NORTON

Sunday Morning Sermon 29.3.20 (Rev Ian)

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EDITED TRANSCRIPT OF THE SERMON:

This is the Rev Ian Howard from Carterton and Brize Norton. That's 14 miles west of Oxford in the UK, and this is a short Talk of 5 to 10 minutes for the Morning Service on Sunday 29th March 2020. We don't have the technology yet to splice it all together, so I have done this Talk, and we're putting it out here on YouTube, so that the Congregation can pause in the Service and find it. If you want to find the rest of the Service and you've just found this Talk, you'll find it on the Facebook Pages of either 'St John's Church Carterton', or 'Friends of St Britius', Brize Norton, which you are very welcome to join, if you want to hear more.

Well, before I give a little Talk or a Message or a Sermon, it's normal to say a little Prayer. So, I'm going to say a little Prayer for inspiration, and then I'm going to talk very briefly on the two Passages we've had this morning. So...

May I speak in the Name of the Living God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

So, we had two Readings this morning in our Church. We had Ezekiel 37 and John, Chapter 11. So, I am going to say something very briefly about each Passage. [...]

So, in our first Reading from Ezekiel 37 we heard the words of a man whom we believe lived at the end of the 7th century and the beginning of the 6th century BC (or BCE) in what was then known as 'The Land of Israel'. Now, I know that this country has had different names – 'The Land of Israel', 'The Roman Province of Judaea', 'Palestine' and so on. So, all those things need to be taken into account, and we need to think about it, but for the purposes of today I just want to say that, when I talk about 'Israel', I'm talking about the word that is used in the Bible for 'The Jewish People', 'The Jewish Nation', wherever they are.

And the Old Testament is the story of how God seeks to reveal Himself to the Jewish Nation with a message of 'Good News' which He then wants to be passed on to the whole world. And the Church today believes that they are continuing in the process of passing on that message to the whole world. In the same way that the Church has made many mistakes over the last 2000 years, the Prophet Ezekiel points out to the people of Israel that they've made some mistakes in their relationship with Him, and in the relationship with other people. And he says that, if they don't put things right, they will end up in Exile.

Well, in fact, they have already ended in Exile, because it's Jeremiah who's made that message the fullest, and Ezekiel has gone in Exile. So, what's happened is that the Northern Kingdom of Israel clearly didn't do what God said. He warned them through other prophets, and they went into Exile in 722 BC to Assyria (which was to the NE of Israel), and then in 586 BC the Southern Kingdom of Israel fell to the same fate, or a similar fate. They were warned, primarily by Jeremiah, and then they went into Exile in Babylon. And Jeremiah had a prophecy, had 'a Word from God', that they would be there for 70 years. That's a prophecy

that a later prophet Daniel picks up on, when he's actually in Babylon, saying 'It's time to go home!'

But in the Book which we call 'Ezekiel', which was either written by Ezekiel or by a team around Ezekiel – anyway it's called 'Ezekiel' -, the prophet warns the Southern Kingdom of Israel (the North has gone into Exile already) that they have not obeyed what God has said, but God wants to draw them back to the land where He put them.

And in this Chapter – Chapter 37 – he has a vision. He has a vision of a valley of dry bones, rattling and coming back to life. They're as dead as anything. They are dusty, but they come back to life, and then suddenly muscles and sinews and ligaments appear on them. And then He says to Ezekiel: 'Breathe on them and prophesy to them'. And he does. The word for 'breath' or 'spirit' or 'wind' is the same word in Hebrew, as in Greek (the main language of the New Testament), and he wants Ezekiel to be part of the process – to prophesy to the bones that they will come back to life. And I think, in passing, that's just a message also for us as Christian believers – that God mysteriously has a part for all of us to play. Yes, He wants to do GOOD THINGS in the world, But He also wants us to ask Him to do MORE GOOD THINGS. And Ezekiel had the task of saying to the bones in this vision., you know, 'Come back to life!' And so, these bones come back to life.

Now, in our Second Reading from John's Gospel, in John 11, we have the story that is usually called 'The Raising of Lazarus'. It's when a friend of Jesus called Lazarus comes back to life in the village of Bethany near Jerusalem about 2 or 3 weeks before He goes to the Cross - which is what we remember at Easter Time. And the important thing to understand is that Jesus got to know this family in Bethany - Mary and Martha and Lazarus - , and suddenly Lazarus has fallen ill and died, and the sisters have sent out a message that Jesus should come and rescue him, because He has a reputation for healing people. But for some mysterious reason that people can't immediately understand, He delays by two days, and when He gets there, Lazarus has been dead 4 days. And Jesus then goes to the tomb (as we have heard in our Reading) and He calls Lazarus out, and Lazarus comes back to life – to everyone's amazement. And so, there we can see, as Christian believers, that God (as we believe that Jesus is God in the flesh – God the Son), He is able to raise people from the dead. And this is for us an important indicator is what is going to happen two weeks later, because in the same way that Lazarus is raised from the dead, Christians believe that at Easter (on Easter Sunday) God the Father, through the power of the Spirit, raises God the Son, Jesus, from the dead. Through Lazarus we can see as believers that it's possible, and then two weeks later, when Jesus Himself is dead, the Father raises the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, there's lots to mediate on there, but the thoughts that I just want to major on in those two Readings are these two:

- (1) First of all, GOD WANTS ALL OF US TO WORK TOGETHE, actually whether Christians or not. He wants all of us to work together. And in that first Reading we see all the bones coming together. Individual bones can't do much, but bones all joined together – all the parts of the Body working together - can make a big difference.

Later, the Apostle Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 12, talks about all of us, who are followers of Jesus, being 'a gigantic Body' – all having different parts in that Body, but all being equally important to God. Some having more important parts perhaps and others less important, but equally valued by God. And whether we're seen or unseen, whether we are a toe-nail or a part of the shoulder or whatever – whatever we are, we have an equally important part to play. So, that's the first point: WE ALL HAVE A WONDERFUL PART TO PLAY.

- (2) And the second point I want to make is this: that GOD IS ABLE TO BRING LIFE FROM THE DEAD – in the same way that the Breath of God brought those bones back to life in the Old Testament and brought Lazarus back to life in the story that we had in the New Testament Gospel, God is able to bring us to life, fully to life through the power of His Spirit. Jesus is said in John, Chapter 10: 'I HAVE COME THAT YOU MAY HAVE LIFE – AND HAVE IT TO THE FULL'.

So, TWO WONDERFUL POINTS to encourage us all in this Service this morning. First of all, that GOD HAS CALLED TO ALL WORK TOGETHER. We belong to one another. We need one another. And together, we can do great things for us, and for ourselves and for God and for our neighbours. But without each other that is just not possible. And secondly, that GOD WANTS TO BREATHE LIFE INTO US, that we become fully alive, fully energised by His Spirit, to do what God has called us to do ...

(8 minutes 27 seconds, 1511 words)