

April 6 2014

**Scripture Lessons ~ Psalm 130**

Ezekiel 37:1-14

John 11:17-27, 38-44

**Sermon**            *The Little Easter*

As Paul shared with us, Easter seems to have come early for Lazarus according to John's Gospel it came 9 chapters and 300 verses earlier than the recorded account of Jesus' resurrection. But then again did Easter really come early for Lazarus? Was he really resurrected before Jesus was resurrected? There are only three accounts of Jesus' raising people from the dead in the four Gospels. This one in John's Gospel, the raising of widow's son at Nain which comes from Luke's Gospel and then the story of rising of Jarius' daughter which is found in Matthew, Mark and Luke in the three Synoptic Gospels. But are these true resurrections from the dead? Are they truly trial runs? Are they truly little Easters which occurred before the big events, the main event? It is safe to say these are occasions when Jesus raised someone from the dead sort of signs pointing to Jesus resurrection. But there is a fundamental difference between the raising of Lazarus and the raising of Jesus. Lazarus was brought back to life in the story true enough but he was brought back to this life. Lazarus was summoned by Jesus to return to the same earthly life that he left behind when he passed on. This then I guess in scientific terms would be more of an experience of resuscitation, being raised from the death to this life and not theologically speaking a resurrection being raised from death to a new kind of life. In the New Testament resurrection is not being called back into this world but it is called forward into a new world. It is being called forward into a new way of living. Resurrection involved a kind of radical turn around as when a caterpillar is changed into a butterfly. So resurrection somehow changes us. Our old body returns to the dust tomb of the earth which eventually breaks forth into a new life into a new and glorified body. God does not restore us to what we were. God makes of

us a new creation. Jesus when speaking of his own death compares resurrection with a grain of wheat which is dropped into the ground and that grain of wheat dies and then sprouts forth into a new crop with a whole lot of grain. The image of a seed being planted into the ground and later emerges in the new shape and form of a tender plant is what is understood in the New Testament of the process of the resurrection. As a seed then differs from a flower so our present body will differ from a glorified body that we will eventually receive. This vital difference between resuscitation and resurrection is supported by the fact that in our story after Lazarus was raised from the dead he returned to live at home with his sisters Mary and Martha. There we might assume he lived to a ripe old age and died, died again. He died because he had been resuscitated not instead of resurrection. Resurrection gives us a new life that we never knew in the midst of death. Jesus tells us in our Scripture lesson for today when he said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me though he died, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believe in me shall never die". Even though Easter did not come early for Lazarus it didn't as you can really tell from this story he had a full dress rehearsal of death and the experience of being brought back to life. He had a dramatic foretaste of what is to come and we hope he faced his second death will be a lot less fear and a lot more hope. And hopefully we would do the same thing if we had the same opportunity. As St Paul said, "We would not have you ignorant Christian brothers and sisters concerning those who have fallen asleep. That you may not grieve as others do who have no hope? For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep."

We might envy Lazarus' experience being raised from the dead but in reality we experience an even greater event being raised from the dead every time whenever we participate or witness something very common in the life of the church. For Christians, baptism is our little Easter. Our kind of Easter comes early. Baptism is in fact is more than a sign that points to a resurrection and new life. It is part of it but it is more than the symbolism of emersion death to new life. It is more than the symbolism of sprinkling, cleansing of the old and becoming new.

Baptism is our trial run. It is our little Easter because by this act we are given a new and resurrected life, at least a little bit right now. The moment we as followers of Jesus are baptized, we affirm our baptismal vows that our parents took for us when we were confirmed, we sort of entered into life that Jesus came to give to each one of us because that new life is Jesus himself. Our Scripture lesson, Jesus says to Mary and Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life" This is our basis of our belief in the life which is yet to come. This life which we know now in Jesus is to know Jesus; is to know that new life. To be baptized into the body of Christ is to somehow to affirm forever that new life that we are given as a gift. So the main issue of concern in the New Testament is not life or death. The real issue of the New Testament is with or without that relationship with God. A little bit of a story in light of which we experience almost daily but not as much as those who give the final amount when they are serving over seas. The mother whose son was missing in action faced the awful anxiety of not knowing if her son was dead or whether that son was alive. So in desperation she went to her pastor and he comforted her with some pretty reassuring words. He said there is only one thing which any of us can be certain, if your son is alive, God is with your son and if your son is not alive, he is with God. To be with Jesus to be with God to be in God and God in us, is life. It is the new life. It is the resurrected life. It is the eternal life. To be in Jesus is to experience that trial run for Easter. It is to experience a little Easter every day as we walk our journey of faith with Jesus.

Together we say AMEN