

Readings:

- **Old testament - Ezekiel 37 vv1-14**
- **New Testament - Romans 8 vv6-11**
- **Gospel - John 11 vv1-45**

Today is the 5th Sunday of lent, also known as Passion Sunday. Lent is the time when we have been looking at ourselves and our lifestyles, and refocusing our lives on discipleship of Jesus, often looking at what we must do to 'amend our lives'. But Passion Sunday marks a change in the mood of Lent, represented by the readings that we have had today. It starts us looking much more clearly at the cross of Jesus- the recognition that what drove Jesus to the cross was not mostly our individual sins, but the Sin that it is in us. What I mean by that is this. If we are just looking at our sins, then the focus is on ourselves and trying to do better. But if instead we see the problem as one of Sin, the power of rebellion that is within us to refuse the rule and reign of God in our lives, then we are much more likely to see the real enemy is the power that sin has over us, not just a few individual weaknesses. If the solution to our sins is trying to do better, then we have missed the point of Lent, and we will come up with the wrong solution – trying to make great efforts to change. But the solution to Sin, the power over us that we cannot break free from in ourselves, then we see the solution as looking to the one who can set us free from the power of sin and death- Jesus Christ. Looking at what we must give up or change is fine as far as it goes, and it is not in itself wrong, but from today onwards the church says we must start thinking of the passion of Christ - that is his death on the cross.

The egg is often used as a symbol of Easter- the egg looks dead, it looks like a stone, but then the egg hatches and in effect comes back to life. That is why we have Easter eggs. However, there is a problem with this egg: it is dead, it has not been fertilized and there is no prospect of life. It is like the parrot in the immortal words of the Monty Python Pet shop sketch:

He's not pinin'! 'E's passed on! This parrot is no more! He has ceased to be! 'E's expired and gone to meet 'is maker! 'E's a stiff! Bereft of life, 'e rests in peace 'He's be pushing up the daisies! 'Is metabolic processes are now 'istory! 'E's off the twig! 'E's kicked the bucket, 'e's shuffled off 'is mortal coil, run down the curtain and joined the ' choir invisible!! THIS IS AN EX-PARROT!!

This is a dead egg! It will not come to life, unless someone puts life in it.

A torch has no batteries, it is dead; but If I put batteries in it the torch comes to life. Another torch has a wind up mechanism to recharge the batteries. It needs a minute of activity and it will work for a while before needing to be recharged,

But what if I could put everlasting power in a battery, then these batteries would never die or need recharging.

In the old testament reading Ezekiel gets a vision of a new army of people – first of all they are just bones, then flesh goes on them, but they have no life until the spirit of God comes upon them.

In the Romans reading Paul says this:

7 For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law--indeed it cannot, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

You cannot please God in yourself; this is like trying to amend your life on your own, it will work, like new year's resolutions up to a point, but it will not change the basic problem, rebellion against God's rule over your life. When you give this up and make Jesus Lord and King of your life, as our baptism candidate promised to do last Sunday, then the change happens, the Spirit is put inside you and this is everlasting life.

9 But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

In the flesh outside of God you do not have life, in Christ you have life. The big problem for the church is that it preaches life in Jesus, but reverts to trying to change things by ourselves, or thinking that with a bit more effort we can please God – we cannot Paul says- see yourselves as dead to sin and Alive to God in Jesus Christ.

11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

The gospel reading from John makes the same point. Lazarus was a great friend of Jesus but when they he heard he was sick Jesus did not hurry there, but waited until he knew that Lazarus had died. There was a belief that the soul of a person lingered around the body for three days after a death, so when Jesus arrived on the fourth day, it was clear that Lazarus was dead, and that the body was decaying. Lazarus was really dead. The sisters, one after another come to Jesus and accuse him of not coming and doing something "**Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.**" **23 Jesus said to Martha, "Your brother will rise again."** **24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."**

There will be a resurrection, at some point when the end of all things comes and the Messiah makes it all right.

**25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,
26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"
27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."**

Jesus is the one who will make all things right, and he had the power to bring Lazarus back to life

33 When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus began to weep.

Why did Jesus weep, at the awfulness and unfairness of death – never was it God's will that death would be in God's world, and now the power of death would be broken by the death and resurrection of Jesus, but Jesus weeps in compassion at the pain that death brings to a fallen world.

Then Jesus raises Lazarus, and they take off the grave clothes and Lazarus was restored to his family. He really was dead, he was then brought back to life, in Jesus the resurrection and the life.

What is this saying to us today? Perhaps it is reminding us that Jesus has the power over death, and the power to bring his new perfect risen life into our lives. Trying to make things better is good, but only if we see that it is God, by His grace who can do this work in us – if we are relying on ourselves, on how we behave to make the difference, then the glory goes to us and not to Him. If we recognize the truth of the situation – that without Christ we have no real spiritual life, but In Christ we have His resurrection power over death, and that in Christ we can 'put to death the deeds of the flesh – what they are is obvious: Paul describes them in Galatians 5

5:19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, 21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

These are the things that show that the power of sin is still gripping us.

Ga 5:22 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

This shows that the work of the spirit is in us, in the risen power of Jesus

24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

Passiontide is a time when we start to think not about our sins, but about the power of Sin, that lives in us, and that Jesus went to the cross to defeat the power of sin and death, and that now He gives us the Spirit, the power to put to death the things of the flesh, and to live a life of the spirit, of love joy peace etc.

Where are you in the scheme of things – are you still struggling with sins and feel that they grip you, anger, sexual impurity, factions, bad behaviour? Or are you recognizing that Jesus has died for these things and has risen to give you new life and the power to put these things to death. You cannot have life by your own efforts – we are spiritually dead without Christ, like the egg with no fertilization. But in Christ we are now alive to God, and ready to receive His new life. What stops us? We do not ask, or are we still holding on to sin, God wants to fill us with the clean spirit, but first the cup of our lives needs to be cleaned by repentance and faith in the cleansing power of the blood of Christ. Do you want to live in Christ in his risen power, like the torch with an everlasting battery? , or just carry on like the wind up torch, shining for a while then needing rewinding. Let us now commit ourselves not to amendment of life by extra effort, but by believing in what our Lord has done for us on the cross – believing that He is truly the resurrection and the life.

At a meeting in a prison chapel, Colin Urquart said to the prisoners “I’ve got some good news for you. God doesn’t want you to reform! He wants you to die!” Die to sin and receive instead the risen life of Jesus.

2Corinthians 5:17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

So the choice is before us- to choose life in Christ, or carry on trying to do better with little or no hope of change.

As peter said to the people of Jerusalem in Acts 2

Ac 2:38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."

**I live, I live because He is risen,
I live, I live with power over sin;
I live, I live because He is risen,
I live, I live to worship Him.**

**Thank You Jesus, thank You Jesus,
Because You’re alive,
Because You’re alive,
Because You’re alive I live.**