**Getting Out of Bed**

Ezekiel 37:1-14
John 11:11-16

All of us have had those days when we are so tired, so in need of sleep and rest that we want nothing more than just to stay in the comfort of our bed. I for one have great empathy for parents of infants. Our first child slept through the night. But, when our son came along, it was a different story. Night after night he was awake crying, which meant we were awake. I was so tired that I could drink a pot of caffeinated coffee at night and go right to bed. I was so tired I could pretty much fall asleep anywhere, anytime. Just hand me a pillow and a place to lie down and I would fall asleep.

 Tiredness, of course, is not limited to parents of young children. We can feel that level of exhaustion at any stage of life. One of the expressions we sometimes use is “I am dead to the world.” According to the urban dictionary, this is a dramatic way of explaining the status of being overworked, stressed out, sleep deprived. It is a way of saying to those around us, “cut me some slack here, I am really, really tired”. It happens to people who toss and turn at night because of worries and concerns. It can happen to anyone who has too many responsibilities and is failing to get adequate rest. The alarm goes off and rather than get up ready to greet a new day, all you want to do is pull the covers up, and stay right where you are in bed.

 When Jesus says he is going to wake his friend Lazarus, the disciples assume that Lazarus is experiencing that type of “dead to the world” exhaustion where he is having a hard time getting out of bed. Jesus says, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep and I am going there to wake him.” Understandably the disciples think making a special trip to wake up Lazarus is going above and beyond the call of duty as a friend and so they respond, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be alright… I am sure he has a snooze alarm and if that doesn’t do the trick, Mary or Maratha can dribble a little cold water on his head”.

 Jesus, however, quickly makes it clear that by asleep he means dead. The disciples have made the mistake of taking Jesus literally, which as you know is a mistake people continue making today. Faith is often, perhaps most often expressed in metaphor. The Psalmist says God is my rock. No one thinks the Psalmist believes there is a rock somewhere that is the creator of the universe. We know the Psalmist is using rock as a metaphor to give us an image of what God is like. Jesus says, Lazarus is asleep, and by asleep he means dead. Lazarus no longer is among the living.

 But, this is where things get tricky, because the story of Lazarus is itself a metaphor used by John to give us an advance preview of the resurrection we will be celebrating in a couple weeks. Jesus says Lazarus is asleep and by sleep he means dead. But, for John dead means more than what happens to us when we cease breathing. Dead for John is a condition, not just of the body, but more importantly of the human spirit. Taking the story of Lazarus death literally would be doing the same thing the disciples did when they thought Jesus meant Lazarus was literally asleep.

If you like your stories straight forward, all tidy and neat, with clear unambiguous meaning, the story of Lazarus is probably not for you. Of course, that would be true for most of the Scripture. Sleep means dead and dead means what we sometimes mean when we say we are dead tired. It has as more to do with our existence, emotionally, morally and spiritually than it does with the condition of our body. Lazarus is dead, really dead, and the early church to whom John’s Gospel is written knows that whatever condition Lazarus is in, it is one where there is no human reason for hope. As a human condition of the body and as metaphorical description of the spirit, death is about recognizing our human limitations.

Death puts us face to face with our own powerlessness, knowing that no matter how much we might wish things were different, no matter how much we might want to change a particular outcome, there is absolutely nothing we can do. Jesus says Lazarus is asleep and by sleep he means dead and by dead the Gospel of John means all those human struggles that bring us face to face with the limits of our own power and ability to change outcomes and situations we wish were different.

I want my children to be happy, but I cannot guarantee their happiness. I want good health for everyone I know and care about, but I cannot guarantee that good health. I want joy in relationships for all my friends, but I cannot prevent the heart breaks that will come their way. I want the children and youth of Cherokee Park United Church to know they are loved by God, but I cannot make them have that experience. I want our members to quit breaking bones, but I know I am doing well to stay on my own two feet, much less keep anyone else standing. I want an end to poverty, a commitment to healing our planet, a willingness to address the historic and cumulative damage of racism done to us all, but like the people to whom the prophet Ezekiel speaks, I know that to rely on my power to effect change is like expecting dry bones to automatically assemble themselves. The Gospel of John is written to people who live under the domination of the Roman Empire and for all practical purposes, changing that system looks hopeless.

Lazarus is asleep says Jesus. By asleep Jesus means Lazarus is dead and by dead John means coming face to face with our own powerlessness, our own ability to control our world and our lives.

Lazarus is asleep says Jesus, but Jesus also knows being asleep, like being dead, need not be a permanent condition. Jesus has a resurrection spirit long before he faces the cross. Jesus sees the sick and trusts God’s spirit to be at work, offering healing where no healing seemed possible. Jesus sees the hungry and feeds the multitude even though no one has a clue where they will get all the food. Jesus sees the outcasts, those who others have deemed unworthy and Jesus says, “you are welcome at my banquet, front row, front seat”, even though the signs clearly say “no foreigners allowed.” Jesus lives the resurrection every day of his life, trusting God’s spirit to give life to dry bones, courage, strength and new life to those who have lost hope.

 As the disciples become aware that Lazarus is in fact dead, Jesus says to them, “for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.” The only counter to death in all its many forms is the experience of God resurrection. No matter how dry our bones feel, how hopeless things might seem, God’s resurrection spirit is at work in our world. Jesus embodies the resurrection for the disciples and they in turn are called to be the embodiment of resurrection for those who come after, just we are called to be that resurrection embodiment today.

 We look around at all the challenges in our own lives and the challenges in our world and it is tempting, it is very tempting to pull the blanket up over our heads, close our eyes and do our best to stay asleep.

I do understand why people make that choice. It’s a choice I know I have made. Getting out of bed is risky business, truly living with compassion, courage and love, can be dangerous.

Knowing how much hostility is already directed at Jesus by those with power Thomas, says, to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him”. These are the words inscribed on your invitation to share in the banquet of God’s love and justice as we come forward to break bread and drink from the cup. “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” Pulling the blankets over our heads, hiding from our own fears, closing our eyes to hurt and suffering, are always an option. But, how might our world be different if we heed Jesus call to get out of bed, to leave the tomb behind and share in the resurrection spirit that gives us life?

**Ezekiel 37:1-14**

*In our first lesson the prophet Ezekiel speaks to people who are emotionally and spiritually exhausted. They are exiles in the foreign land of Babylon and they see no possibility of ever returning to the homes and lives they once new. The prophet uses the metaphor of dry bones to name their reality, but also to offer them a vision of hope for how God is at work, even when things seem hopeless.*

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord."

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord."

**John 11:11-16**

*Our second lesson is a small section from the larger story about Lazarus, who is a friend of Jesus, brother to Mary and Martha. Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was sick, but Jesus delays in coming and before he arrives, Lazarus dies. In our lesson today, Jesus tells the disciples that Lazarus has fallen asleep. The disciples misunderstand so Jesus explains that Lazarus is dead. As the story unfolds it becomes increasingly clear that this story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is a story about the meaning and possibility of resurrection for us all.*

11After saying this, he told them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.’ 12The disciples said to him, ‘Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.’ 13Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep.14Then Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead. 15For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.’16Thomas, who was called the Twin,\* said to his fellow-disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’