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A Resurrection Dress Rehearsal

Malcolm Gladwell in his book *Outliers* popularized the 10,000 hours rule. There is some debate about the finer points of this idea but the takeaway is that if you spend 10,000 hours at something you become an expert. That would be one calendar year doing nothing but practicing your craft. 250 forty hour weeks. 1,250 8 hour work days. That all comes out to around a decade of practicing about 3 hours a day.

We know how important it is to spend time working on the things that we value. The goal is to do something long enough that we don't even really have to think about it. We develop muscle memory. We even use the phrase "second nature." If you've been in theatre or music you know how valuable a dress rehearsal is. Everything is the same as the performance. You wear the proper outfits and all.

On this fifth Sunday in Lent we have found ourselves at what seems like a bit of a resurrection dress rehearsal. We have left the desert of temptation in the rear view mirror and preparation for Easter has overtaken predictable lenten themes. It has been building with each week like the minutes of daylight as we move into spring. Living water, the Samaritan Woman as the first evangelist, the healing of the man born blind, and now someone is actually raised from the dead. It cannot come soon enough. In a thousand ways it can feel like Ezekiel's vision of dry bones has found its way to us. We cry out like a mantra, "mortal, can these bones live."

Violence in the middle east intensifies and expands- mortal, can these bones live?

Officials want 200 billion dollars for war while some many here struggle- mortal can these bones live?

Another ICE abduction in Oak Park on Friday- mortal can these bones live?

There are not as many people at church as there used to be- mortal can these bones live?

We are not as sharp or happy or mobile or successful or busy or good looking or wealthy or appreciated or needed or influential as we used to be- mortal can these bones live?

Age is catching up to us- mortal can these bones live?

The future looks bleak and foggy and uncertain and I'm not sure I even want to be a part of it- mortal can these bones live?

Death still haunts us- mortal can these bones live? There is the voice of the psalmist- "Out of the depths I cry to you O Lord. Lord, hear my voice. My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning."

Martha- "It has been four days and Lord if only you had been here."

Like Jesus we know what it is to be greatly disturbed and deeply moved. All these texts are dripping with relatable emotions.

Can these bones live? On our own the answer is “no.” History doesn’t repeat but it rhymes. “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” On our own, the answer is uncertain.

Jesus enters fully into the depths. He comes close when others turn away and cannot bear to look. Drawing near “Jesus began to weep.” The triune God is not too strong, put together, or reverent that this God cannot give in to grief and lament. Walking all the way to the tomb the word speaks into the void. Words create worlds. Death must yield.

Lazarus comes out. Jesus says to the community gathered then and now “Unbind him, and let him go.” The practice of the new creation. We live in between “can these bones live and unbind him and let him go.” Some have connected the tears of Jesus to healing baptismal waters. When someone meets and mirrors you with such vulnerability- honoring your truth with tears it is like we are unbound. Opened up again. Breath into dry bones.

As I toured the West Side Opioid Task force a couple of weeks ago I felt like I was on holy ground. It’s a community organization in Austin that helps people unbind from the shackles of addiction. They provide resources and testimony to say with confidence- you can be raised again. Going door to door- unlocking tombs and walking forward. Helping those like Lazarus shed the vestiges of the grave. An Easter dress rehearsal. We rehearse resurrection whenever we amplify a story of courage or allow a new truth to take on flesh. Whenever we come to hear that in baptism we have already died and are clothed with the risen Christ so why let the fabric or remnants of death cling to us any longer.

We unbind one another through mutual care. When we feel like we are prophesying to a valley of dry bones. When we believe for our neighbors when they can’t. When we resist evil. When we gather at this table with those who have gone before us. We unbind harmful theology with honest and liberating speech so all can rest in their belovedness. We unbind curses with blessing. Alienation with presence. Unbind tired patterns by asking what is possible. We unbind death with life. On our own the answer is no. But we are together. We’ve seen resurrection. We’ve met Lazarus.

Yes. Like GK Chesterton said: Your name is Lazarus and you live. It’s like second nature. Being born again. Again. Again. Again. Again.