I

Child

Hello, boys and girls. Isn’t it good to be here in church together today? I am glad you are here.

Now, I know all of you know what this is. It is a telephone, and I will bet all of you talk on the phone. It is easy to talk on the phone isn’t it? All you do is dial the number and talk.

Do any of you have a grandmother who lives far away? How often do you talk on the phone to her? (Let them tell you.) Not only do we like to call other people, but we like for them to call us. It is nice to hear the phone ring and have someone say, "The phone is for you." Then we know there is someone there who wants to talk with us.

Did you know that God is calling you? In our Scripture lesson today, we will read how Jesus went to see some good friends of his when one of them died. The man who died was Lazarus. His sisters were Mary and Martha. And, one of the verses in this story is one of my favorites: "The Master has come and is calling for you." And, I want to tell you today that this is still true for us, even now. The Master is still calling for you. Oh, he does not call us on the phone. But, he does call us to believe in him, to follow him, to serve him. He calls us in many different ways. Sometimes we feel in our hearts that God is speaking to us. We hear God’s call as we pray, and we know he is answering us. At other times God calls us as we read the Bible, study in Sunday church school, worship in church. Or, maybe God calls us as we see some problem or hurt that we can do something about.

God calls us in many ways and he is calling each one of us to be a child of God, and to serve him. So, be sure to keep on listening, because God is calling you.

ADULT

Quick quiz for you this morning: whose portrait is on the front of the one-dollar bill? That’s right, George Washington, first President of the United States. If you have a one-dollar bill on you, I’d encourage you to take it out right now and look at it. Don’t worry, this isn’t my sneaky way of taking up a special offering. If you don’t have one on you, you may want to look up an image of one on your phone.

The man who painted Washington’s portrait was a famous artist named Gilbert Stuart. He painted a life-size portrait of Washington in 1795. It is 8 feet tall, 5 feet wide, very detailed. The painting was so well-received that Martha Washington asked him to paint a second portrait in 1796. But the second painting was very different from the first one. Stuart painted just the face of Washington and a little of the background, and then he stopped. He deliberately left the painting unfinished. He believed that leaving the painting partially unfinished would make it more intriguing. He also thought it would make the painting more valuable. To prove his point, he painted dozens of copies of this unfinished portrait and sold them for $100 each. This second, unfinished painting became so famous that it was chosen to represent our first President on the one-dollar bill. (1)

Today marks the fifth Sunday in the season of Lent, a period of 40 days set aside specifically for Christians to reflect on the events leading up to the death of Jesus. For the past three Sundays, we have studied three different people and their encounters with Jesus. Each person came to him with a different question. Each person came to him with a different need. To each person, Jesus revealed some part of his mission as the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

But each one got an incomplete picture, an unfinished picture, of Jesus’ identity and mission. Our story today from John 11 completes that picture. The story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead completes the picture of the Messiah sent from God to rescue and redeem the world. In fact, I believe the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead is a microcosm of the story of God’s salvation of humanity. And it shows us the ultimate purpose of the Messiah and the ultimate sacrifice God would make to save us.

Our story opens when Lazarus, a close friend of Jesus, falls ill. Lazarus’ sisters, Mary and Martha, send him a message: “Lord, the one you love is sick.” And then they wait for Jesus to arrive.

**In the story of Lazarus, we see in miniature the story of the salvation of the world.**From the moment that Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden, humanity has been separated from God our Creator, the Source of Life. And the consequence was both spiritual and physical death. The story of humanity since that moment has been a story of brokenness and suffering, of humans searching desperately for God, or some substitute for God, and God sending prophets, priests and kings in the hopes of restoring our relationship with Him. It is a story of love that never gives up.

“Jesus didn't come to earth to establish a new religion. He came to restore a broken relationship.”

Kathryn L. Butler is a trauma and critical care surgeon who teaches at Harvard Medical School. In an article for *Christianity Today*, she tells how the suffering and evil she witnessed on a daily basis as a trauma surgeon caused her to lose any faith in God. She writes of one night when she tried to save the lives of a young couple who had been attacked in their homes while sleeping, only to be assigned moments later to perform emergency surgery on two teenage victims of gun violence. As one of the teenagers died of his gruesome injuries, his mother appeared in the emergency room door. Her howls of grief echoed in Dr. Butler’s ears that night as she drove home.

On her way home, Dr. Butler stopped on a bridge that spans the Connecticut River. She says she stood on the edge of the bridge, gripped the guardrail, and took a deep breath. She opened her mouth to pray. And no words came out.

She writes, “I felt cut off from God. I thought the Lord—if he even existed—had abandoned me . . . Doubt led to hopelessness, and hopelessness to despair. I dreamed of an eternal sleep, of numbness, of annihilation. Thoughts of taking my own life troubled me daily.”

Can you see how Dr. Butler’s exposure to evil and suffering would cause her to question the existence or the goodness of God? This world is desperately broken and separated from God’s presence. “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

**So Jesus entered into human existence to share our suffering and show us God’s love.**Notice that when Jesus received the message about Lazarus, he and his disciples had just left Jerusalem because an angry mob tried to stone him for blasphemy. He had given up his heavenly majesty and power to become a traveling rabbi who had no home, whose calling to spread the message of God’s kingdom put him in opposition to the religious and political establishment of his day.

A man named Tom Glaser wrote about the day he and his classmates were waiting for their ROTC instructor to arrive for class. One of his fellow officers-in-training said, “Since we usually wait five minutes for a graduate assistant, ten minutes for an assistant professor and 15 minutes for a full professor, how long should we wait for a lieutenant colonel?”

From just outside the classroom door, a gruff voice answered, “Until he gets there!” (2)

How long did Mary and Martha wait for Jesus? Until he got there. Instead of responding immediately, Jesus told his disciples, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” And then he waits two more days to return to Bethany. By then, Lazarus has already died.

Martha is the first to confront him when he gets there. She greets him with the words, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” John doesn’t tell us Martha’s state of mind. But we’re all human. Some of you have experienced a loss so heart-breaking that a part of you died too. You’ll never be the same again. And to add to your heartbreak, you wonder why God, who could have saved them, didn’t.

Notice here that Jesus could have healed Lazarus from afar, as he did for the royal official’s son in John 4. Bethany, the town of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, was just two miles from Jerusalem. Many Jewish friends were at their home mourning for Lazarus when Jesus arrived. Jesus and his disciples walked right back into the area where Jesus’ life was in danger. He didn’t have to face Martha and Mary’s grief and disappointment. He didn’t have to face the mourners’ questions. He didn’t have to put his own life in danger. He chose to enter into their suffering to show them the glory of God.

In 1986, Daniel Hans, a Presbyterian minister, and his wife Beth lost their three-year-old daughter, Laura, to cancer. One of the sermons Daniel Hans preached during that last year of Laura’s life was titled, “Caution: Your God is Too Big.” What did he mean by that?

Hans said that he asked his congregation to share with him their disappointments with God. What is something you hoped God would do, something you prayed for, that God did not do? They shared heartbreaking stories of unanswered prayers, of suffering and death. Hans said that we tend to notice the miracle stories in the Bible, but there are many more stories of suffering and despair that God could have addressed and didn’t.

Hans said that when we only notice the miracle stories, we get too big a view of God’s will. God’s will is to redeem all of creation and heal humanity someday. In the meantime, God came in the flesh in Jesus Christ to walk with us through our suffering and brokenness and grief. (3)

But in the life of Lazarus, Jesus showed us that God will not leave us in our suffering and brokenness and grief. **In the raising of Lazarus, Jesus is showing us God’s ultimate plan to release us from the power of death and the grave.** After Martha’s accusation, Jesus replies, “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Do you believe this? This is the question that Nicodemus faced, the Samaritan woman faced, the blind man faced. That Martha and Mary faced. And that’s the question facing you today. Do you believe this? When your heart is broken and everything important to you has fallen apart, and all the evidence says to give up hope. That there is no purpose or meaning to life. That there is no God.

And then, as you stand beside the grave of your dead faith, with tears pouring down your face, Jesus says to you, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Back in the 1950s, a pastor named David Roberts delivered a sermon in which he said, “Once I heard a man say, ‘I spent twenty years trying to come to terms with my doubts. Then one day it dawned on me that I had better come to terms with my faith.’ Now I have passed from the agony of questions I cannot answer into the agony of answers I cannot escape. And it’s a great relief.” (4)

In this moment, Martha summoned up everything she knew about Jesus. She didn’t have all the answers. She knew he came from God. She knew he could do miracles. But was this humble rabbi in front of her really the revelation and presence and power of God in the flesh? Was he really able to raise her brother from the dead? She had to decide: could she pass from the agony of questions she could not answer into the agony of answers she could not escape? So Martha answered, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

And a few moments later the mourners removed the stone from Lazarus’ tomb. Jesus prayed to his Father, then he called out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” And verse 44 reads, “The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

**And that brings us to the final way in which Lazarus’ story mirrors the story of salvation: In the raising of Lazarus, Jesus sacrificed his own life to release Lazarus from the power of death.**In John 11: 45-53, we read that the raising of Lazarus is the final nail in Jesus’ coffin. The religious leaders, afraid that Jesus’ growing popularity is drawing the attention of the Roman government, began plotting Jesus’ death. Jesus knew that in restoring Lazarus to life, he was signing his own death warrant. He sacrificed his own life to show us how much God loves, and how far God would go, to heal our separation and restore us to Himself.

Do you remember our story of Dr. Kathryn Butler, the trauma surgeon who didn’t believe in God? A few months after she had contemplated ending her life on that bridge, her husband, Scottie, began attending a local church where he accepted Christ as his Savior. He invited Kathryn to join him. She attended but found no comfort or connection to the worship.

Not long afterwards, she began working in the local ICU. One of her patients was a middle-aged man named Ron who had suffered a severe brain injury from lack of oxygen. Neurologists said he showed little brain activity and would most likely never recover. Ron’s wife stayed by his bedside, singing to him, shouting blessings over him, praying desperately for a miracle. The medical staff felt sorry for her. His situation was heartbreaking. Why was she clinging to hope?

And then one day Ron moved his big toe. It was hopeful but could be explained away as an involuntary reflex. Then the next day, he turned his head. In two weeks, he awakened from his vegetative state. In three weeks, he was able to sit up in a chair.

Dr. Butler said that nothing in medical science could explain Ron’s recovery. And the fact that it appeared to be a genuine miracle was troubling to Dr. Butler. What did it mean that God had the capability of performing an awesome miracle, yet He still allowed suffering?

Her husband, Scottie, encouraged her to read the Bible. And in the life of Jesus, she discovered a love that she had never imagined. She writes, “The agony he suffered for our sake left me breathless. He, too, had endured heartache and had confronted the face of evil. And he bore such affliction—our affliction—for us . . . The Lord took my despair and fashioned a canvas for his perfect work. Just as Christ raised Lazarus so that others might believe, so he redeems suffering—the gunshot wounds, the mourning, the lost jobs, the despondency beside bridge railings—for his glory.” (5)

We are two weeks away from Easter. Two weeks away from celebrating the most important event in human history. I pray that in these last four weeks, you have seen Jesus through the eyes of Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the blind man, and Lazarus. I pray you have seen his truth, his light, his power and his love. And I pray that you have wrestled with the question of who Jesus really is. I believe, as did Martha in spite of her grief and her questions, that he is the Messiah, the Son of God. If you have come to believe this too, please pray this morning and accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior and find the new life that he wants so much to give you.

1. “Why 15 Masterpieces Were Abandoned Before They Were Finished” May 13, 2019. <https://www.invaluable.com/blog/unfinished-masterpieces/>.

2. Tom W. Glaser, Reader’s Digest, April 1993, p. 125.

3. Source: Adapted from Daniel Hans, God on the Witness Stand (Baker, 1987). <https://storiesforpreaching.com/category/sermonillustrations/gods-will/>.

4. David Roberts, *The Grandeur and Misery of Man.*

“5. A Critical Care Surgeon Meets the Great Physician” by Kathryn L. Butler *Christianity Today* February 17, 2017. https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/march/critical-care-surgeon-meets-great-physician.html.

Edited from ChristianGlobe Network, Inc., Dynamic Preaching Sermons for the First Quarter,, by King Duncan & Angela Akers

II

What would be your dream job? Can you imagine having a job working for the Queen of England? In February 2018, Britain’s royal family posted a job ad for a Digital communications officer to manage the social media account for Queen Elizabeth II. For £30,000 per year—about $38,000 U.S.—the Digital communications officer will post articles, videos and photos about the Queen’s state visits and royal business on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

The Queen has a worldwide following on social media. And she has a certain image to uphold. It would be a huge responsibility to be the spokesperson for the Queen, or for any major public figure. What qualifications would get the job? In addition to social media experience and a college degree, the royal job ad said the Queen was looking for someone “innovative and with creative flair” who would do their job as part of a “fast- paced and dynamic team.”

Do you think God chose Ezekiel to be His prophet to the nation of Israel because he was innovative and had a creative flair? I doubt it. God seems to choose His servants based on their obedience, not their skill set. And we know Ezekiel wasn’t part of a “fast- paced and dynamic team.” No, the job of prophet is probably the loneliest job on earth. And dangerous too. In fact, if you want to test my theory, then this week try finishing every sentence with the words, “. . . in accordance with prophecy,” and see how quickly people want to punch you. All kidding aside, no one wants to hear hard truths. No one wants to be told that they are sinful and rebellious and on the wrong side of God’s will. There’s an old story about Moishe, a medieval Jewish astrologer who prophesied that the king’s favorite horse would die soon. Sure enough, the horse died a short time later. The king got angry at Moishe, certain that his prophecy had brought about the horse’s death. He summoned Moishe and commanded him, “Prophet, tell me when you will die!” Moishe realized that the king was planning to kill him immediately no matter what answer he gave, so he had to answer carefully. “I do not know when I will die,” he answered. “I only know that whenever I die, the king will die three days later.” Guess what? Moishe lived a long life.

**Prophets have one job: to speak for God.** And sometimes God has some uncomfortable things to say to us. When a person is freezing to death, he feels a pleasant numbness that he does not want to end. He just goes to sleep as he is freezing to death. But when heat is applied, and the blood begins rushing into the affected areas, pain immediately occurs. Though it hurts, the pain is indicative of rescue and cure. God sends a prophet to people who are cold in their relationship with God— spiritually freezing to death—though they want to stay that way. The prophet turns the heat on, and they become angry with him when he is actually working to make them better.

So instead of viewing prophets as killjoys, what if we should view them as symbols of hope. Because if God had given up on His people, He wouldn’t send a prophet. He wouldn’t send anybody. **If God sends a prophet, that means there is still hope.** Ezekiel comes during the Babylonian Captivity. Can you imagine being a refugee, living in poverty in a strange land? Your center of worship has been destroyed. Your community has been scattered. Where is your family? Where are your neighbors? How do you rebuild your life when everything has been taken away from you? Their life was in their worship, in their identity as God’s chosen people. Did this mean that God had

ended His covenant with the nation of Israel? Had the people lost their very identity as the people of the One True God? God sent Ezekiel to these desperate and broken people to answer that very question. God asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”

Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’” The bones came together, bone to bone. he looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.’” Ezekiel brought a word of hope in a hopeless time.

In 1665, the bubonic plague swept through the city of London. In his book *A Journal of the Plague Year*, Daniel Defoe described the devastation we would have seen if we walked the streets of London back then. People who had the means to escape the city did so. Others barricaded themselves in their houses. More than 1500 people died each day. Bodies were piled up in open pits because there wasn’t enough ground or enough grave diggers to give the dead a proper burial. Sounds like places in the Middle East today. Defoe writes that men roamed the streets, prophesying God’s coming destruction on the city. One prophet wandered naked through the streets chanting, “Oh, the great and dreadful God! Oh, the great and dreadful God . . .” Is that what Ezekiel wanted to say when he stood in the Valley of Dry Bones? “O, the great and dreadful God!” Maybe so. It was a terrible time.

David Guzik, in his *Enduring Word Commentary*, writes that Jews insisted on a proper burial for their dead as a way to honor them. So an unburied body was a sign of shame, of disgrace. This was a time of fear, heartbreak and shame for Israel. And then God asks Ezekiel the strangest question: “Son of Man, can these bones live?” Why even ask the question at this point? Why does God try to interject hope in our most hopeless times? When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden and hid themselves from God, God killed an animal and fashioned clothes for them to cover their shame. When Abram and Sarai had reached their golden years without having children, God promised them a son and delivered to them Isaac. When Esther was a teenage bride in a foreign kingdom, God gave her the courage to stand up to a heartless king and save her people. In hopeless situations, God keeps giving His people hope.

So where is the hope in the Valley of Dry Bones? **We find our hope in this: God**

**always keeps His promises.** If God tells you that things are going to turn out all right, trust Him for God always keeps His promises.

Ezekiel was confronted with a challenging situation, wasn’t he? These weren’t people with a future. These were dry bones. And God is calling Ezekiel to prophesy to them. As someone who was called to preach God’s word, I can tell you it is hard enough to prophesy to living people. You may have a hard time believing this, but there are some hardheaded people in churches sometimes who don’t want to listen to a word from the Lord. Why prophesy to dry bones? The power wasn’t in Ezekiel’s prophesy; the power was in Ezekiel’s obedience. The power was in the promises of God.  
So Ezekiel begins to prophesy to the dry bones. And God begins to speak through him And those bodies came to life and stood on their feet and assembled themselves into a vast army. Not a crowd. Not a mob. An army. An army has a purpose. An army has an allegiance. An army has unity and power, a goal and a mission.  
And God explains to Ezekiel that this Valley of Dry Bones represents the nation of Israel. They were dead, hopeless and cut off from the power of God. But they will not remain that way. No matter how circumstances look now, no matter what the history books or the politicians or the pundits say, listen to what God says: “My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.’” God will keep His promises to them.  
But when did God first make those promises to the nation of Israel? Way back in Genesis 12 when God told an old, childless man named Abram to leave his country and his people and go to a land that the Lord would show him. And this was God’s promise that first gave life to the nation of Israel: “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” How would that happen? When God sent His Son, Jesus, through the lineage of Abraham and the nation of Israel, to make a new covenant in his blood that would offer salvation and new life to all peoples on earth (Luke 22). That’s why you and I are here today. We are included in God’s promises too.  
On Sept. 4, 2012, Alex Sheen’s father died. Most people would describe Alex’s father as an “average” man. But Alex describes him as a man of his word. At his father’s funeral, Alex passed out small cards to everyone in attendance. He called them Promise Cards. At the bottom of each card were the words “Because I said I would.” His father lived by those words. He could always be counted on to keep his promises. In honor of his father, Alex challenged those in attendance at the funeral to write a promise on their card and to make a steadfast commitment to keep that promise.  
The people at Mr. Sheen’s funeral were so inspired by Alex’s Promise Cards that he began printing more and sending them for free to anyone who requested them. Today, Alex Sheen runs a nonprofit that does character education programming in schools, colleges and prisons. He teaches about integrity and honor and character, and yes, keeping your promises. And his organization has sent more than 11 million Promise Cards to people in over 150 countries. Think of all the times you have made promises to be with family and weren’t, maybe now is the time to pick up the phone because they

are probably home. To those who can how many times have you promised to give blood but didn’t well, now is the tie it is needed. How many times have you promised to help those in need, there are many ways of doing it now like sewing masks. God keeps his promises, we should too.

God will never forget His promises. God will never forget His people. Across every page of the Bible, God writes His promises and signs them with “Because I said I would.” Listen to the promises God made through Ezekiel. To His people who were dead and hopeless and cut off, He will give new life and new hope. He will bring them back to their home again and put His Spirit within them. He will turn death into life. He will turn a valley of dry bones into the army of God. How do we know this? Because He said He would. “Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.” As we move through this Easter season, remember that God is not done keeping His promises to His people. God is faithful and God’s plans are eternal. And we, as God’s people, can base our lives and our hope on the promises of God.

III

From Fr Joseph Pellegrino

The gripping drama of the rising of Lazarus points towards Jesus as the Lord of Life and prepares us for the celebration of our sharing in His Life at Easter.

However, this gospel is more than this. It is a call for to consider if we are in a tomb. This gospel asks us to hear the voice of the Lord calling us to shore up our courage and to come out of our tombs. We are called to come into the Light. We are called to come to the Life. The gospel calls us to walk to the Lord.

We often put ourselves in tombs. There are times that we feel very dead, particularly dead to the Lord. When we are in this spiritual malaise, we do not want to reflect on our lives. We play a game with the Lord and ultimately with our eternal existence. The game is this: If we do not think about what we have done or are doing to ourselves, then we can attempt to overlook our situation. Only, we cannot really do that, can we? We can fool others into thinking that we are happy, but we cannot fool ourselves.

So, we get involved in things that are negative, nasty, and sinful. We tell others that we are happy with this life. We try to convince ourselves that we are happy with our lives. But we have a difficult time looking into the mirror. We have an even more difficult time walking into a church. And we have a horrible time taking God inside  
of us, or simply sitting before Him in the Blessed Sacrament.

We try to blame others. We make believe that they have put us into the  
tomb. For example, others have said, “You don’t know what you are missing. Drink this. Take that. Do this. Do that. You will be happy. Loosen up! You are the only one at the party who is not drinking. Everybody is taking X now, why do you think you are so different? Of course we have sex; you’re the only one I know who doesn’t.” And with a group around us, with our defenses down perhaps due to various difficulties in

our lives we say, “No big deal. I should try this. I should do that. Everybody else  
is.” Then, the next day, if not sooner, we feel rotten, dirty, even dead. We can blame others for putting us into the tomb, but ultimately, we did it to ourselves. We chose sin and suffer from it.

There are also times that we race into a tomb completely on our own, without the temptation of others. We convince ourselves that this or that is not going to hurt us so much. And we go places where a Christian does not belong, be those places in the world or within our own rooms, or we do things to ourselves that frustrate ourselves, and then we feel dead.

“Come out, Lazarus!”

Jesus is calling us. We are all Lazaruses. He is calling us to come out of the darkness, and come into His Light. He is calling us to come out of the place of death and come into His Life. In his second book on Jesus, Pope Benedict XVI points out that the early Christians referred to themselves as *The Living*. That is what we are called to be, alive in an otherwise dead world.

Out of the tomb, into the light, out of the tomb, into His Life we experience indescribable joy. We are one with Jesus. We are at peace. We no longer view others as threats to our happiness. No, others become a road to happiness as we serve the presence of God within them. Out of the tomb, away from our sins, we see others as unique reflections of God, as people who can bring us to a deeper understanding of God’s love.

So, we ask ourselves today, “Am I happy with myself? Am I comfortable with my life? Am I happy with my relationship with God?” Those questions are just different ways of asking the same thing: “Am I alive, or am I dead?” Or, perhaps, “Is there something that is killing me?” Maybe, our relationship with others is pretty bad, and we tend to get nasty rather easily. Maybe we have friends that we try it impress by flaunting our sexuality, by joining them in drinking and drugs. We do our best to ignore the dying we feel within us, but the dying does not go away because we want it to go away. The way of death only goes away when we choose to walk away from it.

We ask ourselves today, “Where have I found joy? When has it been in my life that I have been truly happy? This leads us to focus on the times that our union with Jesus was so intense, so strong, that all we wanted to do was just relax in His Love.

Lazarus, come out!

We ask God today for the courage to walk away from that which is killing us and to walk towards the voice that is saying, “Leave this place of the dead and live in My Light, in My Love, in My Joy.

From John 3:17

*God sent His Son into the world not to condemn the world but so that through Him the world may be saved; so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.*