

## **Seeking: Honest questions for deeper faith**

### **Week 5 – Can these bones live?**

We are in the fifth week of Lent  
and our Lenten message series we are calling:  
“Seeking: Honest questions for deeper faith.”

Over the past few weeks of this message series,  
we have heard many stories of those who are seeking:

- \*Adam and Eve in the Garden after an encounter with a snake,
- \*Peter and the disciples on Mt. Tabor,
- \*the Israelites thirsty in the desert,
- \*a Samaritan woman at the well,
- \*a man born blind really seeing for the first time.

Today, we hear the story of Mary and Martha  
at the tomb of their brother Lazarus.

In each of these stories, someone is seeking  
a new beginning, a different life, a deeper faith.

Each story unfolds with questions asked and faith  
explored.

Often, an unveiling occurs where assumptions are disrupted, and a new perspective is revealed.

If you are new to Church or returning to Church after some time away, you are probably returning with more questions and a critical lens.

We hope this series is helping all of us unpack some of those big questions in ways that are honest and faithful.

And I invite us all to continue engaging in the spiritual practice of seeking.

In your seeking, stay curious, open, and nimble....soften your assumptions and expand your perspectives.

I've been saying over the course of this message series that, faith has two connotations: the deposit of faith that is handed down by the Catholic Church and the faith that we each personally embrace.

The deposit of faith is unchanging but how we personally live the faith is a journey.

Part of this journey is about seeking God in the world, seeking the good, seeking a deeper truth.

As Catholics, we seek through prayer, the sacramental life of the Church and even scripture. In our seeking, we pull together memories, feelings, questions, and experiences, all in an effort to see God more clearly.

As I have been sharing with you, our seeking in our message series will be guided by a question each week.

I pray that these questions are creating a safe space for you to be raw and honest with your doubts, your fears, your confusion.

Ultimately, I pray that this journey of seeking leads each and every one of you to a new beginning, a restoration, a wider grace.

In our first week, we looked at the question, “who will you listen to?”

We experience an onslaught of media in our culture from: TV shows, movies, the news, social media, YouTube.

We must choose carefully “**who**” we will listen to.

At the end of that message, we invited you to consider what voices might be pulling you toward what is life-giving rather than death-dealing.

In the second week of our message, we looked at the question, “how do we begin again?”

By looking at the Transfiguration of Jesus, we learned that it isn’t about the mountain top experience or the transfiguration part that is transforming.

The Transfiguration shows that Jesus is the one who can transform us, **and** it is in listening to Jesus that we are transformed.

Then, we explored the question, “Will you give me a drink?” as we heard once again the story of the Samaritan woman at the well.

We said that our physical thirst is only an echo of the way in which our hearts are meant to ache for God.

Our need and capacity for God is infinite.

It takes an infinite God to satisfy our needs.

That also means that the things of this world will never satisfy our thirst. **So what can we do?**

We need to ask God to give us a drink...  
to fill this longing in our hearts.

Last week, we asked the question, “Do you want to see?”

And we saw, in the story of the man born blind, that both the disciples and the Pharisees brought their own assumptions to the table.

The disciples assumed that the man or his parents must have sinned in order for him to be born blind.

The Pharisees assumed that Jesus must not be from God because He healed the blind man on the Sabbath.

While it appears that the disciples are open to move past their assumptions, the Pharisees’ encounter with Jesus, shows that it is **they** who are blind.

In the story, the blind man experiences the most growth.

He was healed both physically and spiritually,  
and is able to see Jesus clearly as the Messiah.

The question then becomes for each one of us,  
“Do you want to see?”

Are we willing to move past our own assumptions,  
to have our eyes spiritually opened  
and really see the glory of God?

All of our past messages can be accessed on the home  
page of our website. Just click on “Message Series.”

Before we dig into our question for today,  
I want to spend some time looking at the state, of what  
could appear to be, a struggling world around us.

- We have increased political divisions in the society.
- Rising prices of the economy and the anxiety it brings
- The intrusion of technology into every corner of our lives.
- Increased divisions even within our own families.
- Multitude of voices pulling us in a variety of directions.

And this list doesn't even include the usual things that life throws at us: death, sickness, and changes we have to face.

It sounds like a litany of secular yuck.

And then there is Church yuck too:

- The ongoing ripple effect from scandals in the Church.
- The increasing presence of the state in Church affairs.
- Children not staying connected to the faith as they get older.
- Divisions within the Church around issues of morality and "proper" worship.
- The ongoing impact of secular society on the church.

And this all leads to a lack of attention to the central mission of our Church...to point people to Christ.

There's a collective anxiety wreaking havoc on every institution and system we have.

And the question becomes...

How do we move through grief, trouble, death...change?

Can you tell this is going to be a heavy message?

What we find in the readings today is hope.

God's message for us in the scriptures today is an invitation to **see past** the rubbish, the damage, the crisis, the violence, the signs of decay.

Even in the darkest places of this world, life still lingers there.

Do you dare to believe—and even trust—that the power of life does not ever go underground in such a way that God cannot revive it in glory?

Today's first reading from Ezekiel is about a vision that the prophet had of a valley of dry bones.

Just before the reading we heard today, God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to “these dry bones.”

It is certainly not a pleasant scene to imagine.

However, speaking through the prophet, the breath of God breathes new life into the bones.

God promises that He will bring the people of God back to Israel.



In the spirit of this reading...

Our question that we are exploring today is

“Can these bones live?”

Many years later, Mary and Martha must answer this question in the face of two contradictory realities: their belief in Jesus, and their brother, Lazarus, who has been dead for four days.

They understand enough to know that Jesus brings life.

But now this question asks more of them:

“Do you have faith that life is possible, always?”

We come to hear that Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

But what is the point of that?

There are many things we learn from this story.

First of all, Jesus can raise people from the dead.

He has authority over all things, even death.

Now, I don't know about you, but I haven't seen people come back from the dead.

I'm happy for Martha and Mary in this story but...  
Lazarus will still die one day.

But secondly, this action foreshadows the resurrection of our body at the Second Coming.

Belief in Jesus, as the Way, the Truth and the Life, gives us hope in the future when we will share eternal life with Jesus.

But what does this mean for us in the now with our litanies of secular and Church yuck?

When you find yourself in a valley of dry bones, when all hope seems lost... when division, frustration, suffering, confusion, death, and grief surround you, we could easily, with desperation, cry out, "Can these bones live?"

Another way to ask this question could be, can we trust that life is always possible in God?

In the first reading today, Ezekiel shows by his actions that he trusts that God can bring new life even to dry bones.

In the Gospel today, Martha and Mary both tell Jesus that they know that their brother would not have died if He was there. To that, He responds to Martha with, *"I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me even if he dies will live and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."*

He then asks her, "Do you believe this?"

Jesus asks this question of us too, "Do you believe this?"

Where is fear or cynicism holding you back from seeing life right now...seeing Jesus working in your life, right now?

Can you find glimmers of God's abundance even in this valley of the shadow of death?

God doesn't ask us to believe the situation will get better.

But rather...**and here is the point for us today,** God asks us to believe that life itself will not, in the end, cower under the pressure of the yuck of our lives.

And He is always calling us back to Him.

He wants more than anything else to breathe new life into the dry bones of our lives.

Today's remarkable gospel story proclaims that no one is so far gone into death that Jesus cannot call him or her back to life.

For He is our resurrection and life.

This radical hope is ours to not only believe, but to also proclaim this. Once we believe, once we have hope, this good news changes us; it gives us new life. Hope gives us the answer to face the darkness; this is too good to keep to ourselves. We need to share this truth with others.

While we look to **God** to carry us through the valley, God looks to **us** to embody hope for others.

As we prepare to enter Holy Week, we remember how Jesus began His final journey toward His passion, death, and resurrection: by returning to Judea after the death of His dear friend, Lazarus.

As we walk through the valley of dry bones that leads us through Holy Week, let us seek out the

hope that stirs in and sustains us...and then share that radical hope with others.

For all disciples in every age,  
Jesus is the one whom we must trust to grasp us,  
raise us up from our fears and bring us to new life.

Like the characters in our Lenten scriptures,  
we are also seeking many things: clarity, connection,  
wonder, justice, balance.

Jesus has the ability to heal us from our brokenness,  
our blindness, our sinfulness.

In our gospel story today, we see Jesus bring Lazarus  
back from death. But do we really believe that Jesus can  
heal the broken and dead places in our lives? The  
question for us becomes,  
“Do you believe these bones can live?” With this Gospel  
story today...I know they can.