

A NOTE TO PARENTS

When my daughter was two, I had recently begun *The Sunday Paper*. At bedtime she would ask me to draw for her—usually a sleeping little girl on a tiny scrap of paper to take to bed with her. But for weeks after I had shown her the story of the raising of Lazarus, instead of a sleeping baby she wanted a “crying Jesus.”

The story of Lazarus is our last look at Jesus’ ministry before he walks the way of the Cross, and it contains the way of the Cross in miniature: Jesus goes down to death and returns to life on behalf of his friend Lazarus, before he does so once and for all, for us. And it is not easy. Jesus sighs and groans; Jesus weeps. My daughter’s intense reaction to my drawing of Jesus crying—her repeated request that I draw it again, for her to take to bed—showed me what I knew already from my own heart: it is terribly important to us to know that Jesus wept. He cries with us; he cries for the anguish of the whole world. We are told that God will dry every tear ... good news that is much more believable because we know that God himself has wept those tears with us.

The story of Lazarus, and Ezekiel’s vision of the Dry Bones, (today’s Old Testament reading) are two of the most powerful passages in the Bible, speaking directly to our deepest hopes and our deepest terrors. As the “crying Jesus” affected our first daughter, the Dry Bones story affected our second—at three, having seen it mimed in the Sunday School Easter Pageant, she had me read it to her every day for a week, till she knew it almost by heart. One day I heard her in her room, talking to herself: “Son of man, can these bones live? And the son of man said, ‘Of course they can!’” Yet you will search in vain in the vast majority of children’s Bibles and Sunday School curricula for these stories, or, indeed, even for the promise that God will dry every tear. Why? Why do we offer our children such a severely limited selection of Scripture, endlessly “retold,” prettified and distorted? Are we afraid to lay bare to them what we really believe? Or don’t we actually believe it ourselves? Or are we in fact more interested in inducing them to “be nice” and behave well than in truly offering them the Good News?

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Year A
5th SUNDAY
in LENT



JESUS'S FRIEND, LAZARUS, HAD DIED.

Jesus went to Lazarus's house. Lazarus's sisters, Mary and Martha, came out to meet him.

They said, "Master, if only you had been here to save him, our brother would not have died."

Jesus was crying, too. But he said, "Take away the stone from the cave where he is buried."

The sisters said, "But it will smell!" Jesus said, "LAZARUS! COME OUT!!"

Jesus cried, because he loved Lazarus and his sisters. He cried because sin and death have spoiled God's world for all of us. He cried, because death is a strong enemy. Soon, he would face death himself, on the cross. Jesus fought against death, and won new life for all of us!

O DRY BONES, HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD
I WILL RAISE YOU FROM YOUR GRAVES, O MY PEOPLE, AND YOU SHALL LIVE

Make the dry bones come back to life!