

A LONGER LOOK AT THE LESSONS

Study Guide and Leader Guide

for Pericopes as Listed in *Lutheran Service Book*

Series A

Lent 1–Easter 7

By Ken Behnken

Lesson 5

Fifth Sunday in Lent

The Holy Gospel: John 11:1–53

Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary, were Jesus' good friends. Jesus probably stayed with them when He was visiting Jerusalem. During religious festivals, the thousands of pilgrims were not allowed to stay overnight in Jerusalem—and Bethany was convenient, just two miles to the east, beyond the Mount of Olives. But Jesus and His disciples were probably in Perea, east of the Jordan River, when word reached them about Lazarus.

73. What was Jesus' immediate analysis of the situation of His friend?

Jesus' words led the disciples to expect Lazarus's recovery, but finally He told them that Lazarus had died and they were going to him.

74. How could Jesus be glad that He was not in Bethany to heal Lazarus?

75. John used the words "the Jews" to refer especially to the religious leaders. What does it say about Lazarus and his family that "many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them"?

Martha's greeting showed her disappointment that what she had hoped for had not happened, but she did not close the door of possibility. She said, "Even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." Jesus encouraged her to maintain an expectant faith with His great "I am" statement. The Greek has *egō eimi*—an emphatic "I, I only, am." This is the fifth of seven times in which John records Jesus' bold use of this designation for Himself in describing His messianic ministry. Remember, "I AM" is *Yahweh*, the name by which the Lord established His covenant with Israel. Here Jesus was making the strongest claims for Himself as the source of all life.

76. How did Martha respond to Jesus' "Do you believe this?"

Also in recording Martha's confession of faith, the Greek employs an emphatic *egō* along with the verb "I have believed." Martha was bold in her faith and in her expectation. When Martha went to tell Mary, she called Jesus "the Teacher," emphasizing that He taught her and her sister alongside the men.

77. What is suggested by the fact that Mary approached Jesus with the same words her sister had said to Him?

78. Jesus knew what He was going to do. Why, then, was He so deeply moved in spirit and troubled as He saw the others weeping?

79. What do Martha's words at her brother's tomb establish as a fact?

Lazarus was clearly and fully dead. At Jesus' command, the one whose body had already begun to decompose came out of the tomb alive, validating Jesus' bold "I am the resurrection and the life."

80. What effect did this miracle have on some of "the Jews" who witnessed it?

This miracle, planned by Jesus and done in a suburb of Jerusalem, moved Him a decisive step closer to the cross and the culmination of His ministry.

The Old Testament Lesson: Ezekiel 37:1–14

Ezekiel lived in a time of international upheaval. Assyria had dominated the Middle East and had destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel but was itself overthrown by Babylonia. Egypt, trying to reassert its influence over Palestine and Syria, made Judah its vassal state for a time. But Babylon's power was on the rise, and soon it became Judah's overlord. When King Jehoiakim rebelled, Judah was subdued and ten thousand of the leading Jews, Ezekiel included, were exiled to Babylonia. Zedekiah was appointed puppet-king and he, too, foolishly rebelled. The Babylonians then laid siege to Jerusalem, and in 587 BC its walls were breached and the city and Solomon's beautiful temple were plundered and burned.

Ezekiel was of a priestly line and was a man of superior intellect. He served as God's priest-prophet to the people in exile before and after the fall and destruction of Jerusalem. *Ezekiel* means "God strengthens," and that was his message to the exiles: Jerusalem's fall was inevitable, but God would strengthen the exiles to be His people where they were if they would turn to Him. The temple, desecrated by heartless ritual, was doomed, but God would dwell in their midst also in a strange land. The city and temple were destroyed and their very national identity was threatened, but the people would experience revival, restoration, and a glorious future as the redeemed and perfected kingdom of God.

Today's lesson is part of that word of comfort and hope. Because this vision of the valley of dry bones has been told in a popular spiritual song, it is probably the most widely known part of Ezekiel.

81. What promise did Ezekiel's vision hold out to the people of Judah in exile?

82. The different concepts represented by our English words *breath*, *wind*, and *spirit* were all expressed by the one Hebrew word *ruach*. How does this influence our understanding of the message of the vision?

“And you shall know that I am the LORD” is a major theme of Ezekiel. The phrase “and you shall know” or variations of it appear no fewer than sixty-five times in Ezekiel.

83. How does Ezekiel’s vision apply to us and offer guidance for our lives?

84. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 8:1–11

These are the first verses of what many Christians consider one of the greatest chapters in the Bible. Having established the vital principle of justification by faith alone, and not in any way by works, Paul turned to what life in the Spirit means for the justified. Spiritually, things become as different as light and darkness, confidence and despair, life and death. It is like leaving one room behind, the room in which self-will rules and sin separates and death is eternal, and entering a new room in which the Spirit of Christ rules and sin is covered by forgiveness and death has been swallowed in the victory of life.

85. How did Jesus describe the radical nature of this change in John 3:3–6?

According to Paul’s words here, life in the Spirit of Jesus means the following:

- “There is therefore now no ___ for those who are ___.”

- “The law of the Spirit of life has ___ in Christ Jesus from the law of ___.” In the Greek, “set free” is in the aorist tense, which indicates an act in the past with results that still apply in the present. This assures us that we have been set free once for all!

- “The ___ might be fulfilled in us, who walk . . . ___.”

86. What are the requirements of the Law? How are they fully met by our living according to the Spirit?

- “Those who live according to the ___ set their minds on ___.” They enjoy ___ and ___.

87. How does our society evidence the fact that its mind is often set on what the sinful nature desires and thus is hostile to God and does not submit to His Law? What results from that kind of mind-set?

• We have the ability to ___ because the ___ dwells in us.

88. How does 1 John 4:19 describe the essential difference the indwelling Spirit of Jesus makes in us?

89. Why is having the Spirit living in us the determining factor in our belonging to Christ? (See 1 Corinthians 12:3; Titus 3:4–8.) What living hope is ours because the Spirit who raised Jesus is living in us?

90. How can we work at growing in having our lives controlled by the Spirit of Jesus living in us?

Lesson 5

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: John 11:1–53

73. Many commentators think that Lazarus was already dead when Jesus received the message from Bethany—and that Jesus knew it—but His immediate reaction was to say, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

74. It was for the disciples’ sake that Jesus said He was glad. They would see a marvelous demonstration of His glory as God’s Son. But as Jesus talked about returning to Judea, the disciples could only remember the threat of the Jewish authorities that had caused Him to leave Jerusalem. Jesus let them know that the full twelve hours of His “working day” would not be cut short—though sunset was indeed getting close for Him.

75. The fact that so many came to visit them showed that Lazarus and his sisters evidently were prominent in Jerusalem circles and were probably well-to-do.

76. Encouraged by Jesus’ decisive “I am the resurrection and the life,” Martha boldly confessed, “I (have) believe(d) that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.” Help your group appreciate the emphatic quality of *egō* used with the verb. In Greek, the *I* is built into the verb *pepisteuka*. By itself, it means “I have believed,” a form that said her faith had begun in the past and continued to the present. Using the pronoun *egō* in addition to the verb emphasizes the statement very strongly.

77. During the days of Lazarus’s illness, the sisters must have said “If only Jesus were here” to each other many times. It’s why they had sent for Him.

78. Jesus’ knowledge that He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead did not negate the fact that His friend Lazarus had died, that Jesus cared about Lazarus’s friends and family who were suffering greatly, and that even after being raised, Lazarus would someday again die a physical death. All this Jesus experienced emotionally in His full humanity. As the most brutal reminder of the effects of sin in the world, death is always cause for sorrow, even for those who also know that the joy of the resurrection is to come.

79. Martha’s words establish that Lazarus was in fact dead and not just in a coma. Jesus’ praying aloud focused the crowd’s attention on Him as the one sent by God, in the act of publicly demonstrating that He is indeed the resurrection and the life.

80. Scholars generally feel that when John spoke of “the Jews” instead of just “the crowds,” He was referring to the influential Jewish leaders—even members of the Council and their representatives. Some of these were led to put their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Others, in stubborn unbelief, went back to report to their superiors and to participate in deciding what to do to counter this dramatic action by Jesus. Jesus always has that either/or effect on people as they are confronted by the Gospel (see John 3:16–18; 2 Corinthians 2:14–16).

The Old Testament Lesson: Ezekiel 37:1–14

81. The vision held the promise of the nation of Judah coming to life again by the Lord's power and intervention, just as the Spirit brought new life to the dry bones.

82. The Hebrews did not distinguish between these words and concepts, especially in a literary setting such as this, but understood that the whole thrust was on the Spirit of God being called on to supply new life. In our setting, we understand that we are the dry bones, just as they were, and are dependent on the Spirit for new life in Christ.

83. "And you shall know" is still significant for us. Because we hear the Word of the Lord with hearts as well as ears and experience for ourselves the truth of His promises, our trust in Him to be our Lord and to do what He wills to do for our benefit grows accordingly.

84. Lazarus's body was lifeless and decomposing and becoming dry bones. He was restored to life by God's power just as Judah's restoration would be by God's power.

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 8:1–11

85. Jesus described this radical change in terms of being born again. Just as we are not born physically by our own power but yet birth opens up a whole life to us, so we are not born again by our own power and this birth also opens up a whole new life in Christ to us.

Fill-in Answers:

- "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Only one thing can separate us and bring condemnation: our willful rejection of Christ as Savior and Lord.

- "The law [rule] of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law [rule] of sin and death." Point up the fact that this is an accomplished fact through the work of Christ. The only thing that can change this is our willful return to slavery to sin and death.

- "The righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk . . . according to the Spirit."

86. Jesus summarized the Law by quoting Scripture: "Love God with all your heart; love your neighbor as yourself." Living according to the Spirit first of all means living in faith, justified, declared righteous for Jesus' sake; then the Spirit opens up and enables a willing love for our Savior God and a desire to serve Him in serving others.

Fill-in Answers:

- "Those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit." They enjoy life and peace.

87. The humanistic outlook of our society looks to itself to develop the values by which life is guided, and its values are almost always relative and situational. Leaders who promote such an outlook are usually even angered when God's Law is quoted and pointed to as an absolute. They see the law as repressive, stifling the human spirit which yearns to be free and determine for itself what is good and what is evil in the given situation. But this really repeats the original sin. The result is that God is replaced by human psychology, His Law is replaced by permissiveness and self-determination, and the lasting values that give a stable foundation are eroded. Broken homes, disturbed and abused children, increased crime, pervasive drug use, unethical behavior by leaders, rampant sexually transmitted diseases, etc., are evidences that surround us.

Fill-in Answers:

- We have the ability to please God because the Spirit of Christ dwells in us.

88. As the Spirit makes Jesus personally meaningful to us as our Savior, we are led to love Him who loved us first and to do our best to please Him as our Lord by loving and serving those around us.

89. We cannot belong to Christ without the Spirit because Christian faith and life are the results of His saving work. When the Spirit of Christ lives in us, we have the living hope that He will give life also to our mortal bodies—the promise of eternal life as who we are, in glorified bodies fully equipped for life in the new heaven and new earth in which righteousness dwells.

90. We can work at having our lives controlled by the Spirit by conscientiously using Word and Sacrament and maintaining communication with Christ in prayer.