



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“COME OUT!”

Scripture Lessons: Ezekiel 37:1-14; John 11:38-44

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, November 11, 2018  
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

John 11:38-44

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’ Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, ‘Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?’ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, ‘Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.’ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

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Let us pray...

Almighty and Everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be pleasing, acceptable, and even joyful in your sight, for you are our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

It never ceases to amaze me just how invincible children think they are. I can remember as plain as day pulling into our driveway in Marion, South Carolina and noticing off in the backyard, atop our tallest dogwood tree, quite literally blowing in the wind, was our firstborn son, Harrison, who at the time, was probably somewhere between the ages of five and six.

As my car rolled to a stop my eyes remained fixated on that tree. I remember thinking to myself, “How in the world did he get up there? Please don’t let him fall!” The lone image of Harrison falling to the ground from nearly 20’ in the air was fully occupying my mind.

Now, I’ve come to realize, that there are at least two techniques by which a parent can respond to a crisis situation that involves a child. The first technique is somewhat open ended, and it

demands that a parent get their child's attention by any means necessary. For example, when a child is running into the street you simply have to stop them and you do whatever you have to do, even if that means screaming at the top of your lungs! The second technique is used at those times when a more subtle approach to a crisis is necessary. Let's say if I had run up to the tree and yelled, "Harrison, don't be scared. Daddy's right here. I'll catch you if you fall." Had I done that, Harrison may have suddenly realized that there was actually something to be worried about, and, based upon the way he was laughing and swaying to and fro, he was clearly oblivious to any potential danger.

And so what I did was to simply walk up to the base of that dogwood tree and in a steady, calm voice I simply said, "Harrison, I'm home. Why don't you come down and tell me about your day." Harrison seemed pleased with that idea, looked down and joyfully exclaimed: "Catch me!" It was at that moment that I reverted back to the first technique, and I yelled, "n...n...n...n...nooooo! I can't catch you from there." Unfazed by the panic in my voice, Harrison simply yelled back down, "Then move." I honestly believe that Harrison may have actually jumped out of that tree had I not been there to stop him.

As I was preparing this morning's sermon, I found myself wondering where that sense of immortality comes from and at what point in our lives do we lose it - at what point do we realize that we are but flesh and blood, and actually aware of just how frail we truly are!

I imagine that a kind of false sense of security had plagued even the people of God over the years. And looking back at ancient Israel, for example, it is easy to see why. After all, they were God's chosen people, and theirs was not only the monarchy which was ordained by God, but theirs was also the Promised Land which had been given to them by God; this was the temple where God made known His glory.

I suspect that it would have been easy for them to think that they were somehow invincible / untouchable...but they weren't! You see, things have changed by the time the prophet Ezekiel comes on the scene. As a result of their sins and the sins of their ancestors, God's people are now in exile; the king is in captivity; the land is occupied; and the temple is destroyed! As a nation, they are like a valley of dry bones - dead and lifeless.

Imagine that...Israel, this once mighty nation, chosen by God to embody streams of righteousness - imagine her physically dried up like a parched river bed. Imagine God's people spiritually as dry as a bone. They cry out: "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely..." and indeed, they were; but we have the benefit of knowing the rest of the story! We have the benefit of observing that, in the end, God does not abandon his people. In fact, if our reading from Ezekiel shows us anything, it reveals that just as a valley of dry bones can be given new life, so too can God's people be restored.

It is interesting to note that some people perceive the story of Lazarus in much the same way as they do the story of the dry bones, in the sense that they perceive it not so much as a story of a family grieving the loss of a loved one as they do a story about a world caught in the grip of sin and death. They say that the story of Lazarus is a story of our need to trust in God; because, without God, the world can feel like a cemetery.

Yes, as God had done before, God demonstrated that in Christ Jesus our Lord, that sin does not have the last word. Jesus puts it like this: "I am the resurrection and the life!" In other words, in Jesus there is power over death, and that is good to hear because if we have lived at all, we know that there come those times when the world convinces us that we are not nearly as strong as we thought we were; or worse, that in us there is no life – to any of God's children that would feel that way, as if they were wearing burial cloths and trapped in the darkest corner of some stone cold tomb – to all of God's people in Jesus Christ, he comes, and he says in a voice that is loud and clear: "Come out!"

All who feel that life is finished and gone, to those who fear that evil has carried the day...that darkness has prevailed, those for whom their hopes and dreams are like scattered bones on a desert floor, oh, to anyone who finds themselves unable to see the redemptive and life-giving power of God – to all such people God says: "Come out!" – for that is not where we belong!

In what has been described as the quickest work of his life, George Matheson wrote the hymn, "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go." Matheson was a remarkable man. At that time in his life when his fiancé broke off their engagement and he was left brokenhearted, and upon being assigned to a very rural Scottish parish upon his graduation from seminary, instead of being consumed by sorrow and bitterness and resigning himself to the distress of never being able to see a rainbow again – because he was also rendered blind at the age of 20, in spite of all his circumstances, he still had the faith to pen these words:

O joy that seekest me through pain,  
I cannot close my heart to thee;  
I trace the rainbow through the rain,  
and feel the promise is not vain,  
that morn shall tearless be.

Friends, there is no doubt that the future will sometimes seem bleak and we will occasionally have to weather the nearly invincible storms of life, but God has shown us in Christ Jesus our Lord that there is always a future with God!

We are not immortal. We are not untouchable. We are frail and we are vulnerable. If we drop from a 20 foot tree, we're probably going to hurt ourselves. But it would also do well to remember that God in Christ did not die on the cross because we were so strong, but precisely because we are so frail. We are so weak.

Our immortality will come alright; and, in fact, the story of Lazarus demonstrates that at some level our eternity begins to be realized even as we put our trust in Jesus Christ; it shows us that our life in Christ cannot be destroyed; because in Jesus Christ we have not the one who speculates about the resurrection – but the One who is the resurrection!

I'll leave you with this, in his book, *Resident Aliens: Life of the Christian Colony*, our recent Parramore Preacher, Will Willimon, writes that from [the story of Lazarus] we are faced with the power of Jesus to call us out from where we are buried, buried in our fears, our pain, our grief, our worries, life's pressures. Willimon goes on to assert that it is "never too late to choose to live again [right] now and respond as Lazarus did to Jesus and [to come out]"...and live again!

Let us pray...

Gracious and Loving God, from the tombs of our lives, those places where we hardly notice the stench of decay anymore - breathe on us, awaken us, and call us out to live yet again. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*\*The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.*