

ZOMBIES AMONG US

I thought about showing up looking like a zombie,..... but I decided I didn't want to forgo my morning coffee.

Plus I have to do drive to get here.

There are some bones and body wrap on the front table { }

But, the visual effects are not really necessary..... because, today,.....we have Zombies everywhere. Zombies are everywhere.

In the "Valley of Dry Bones", the dead come back to life-- bone by bone, tendon by tendon and muscle and skin, all come to life.

Lazarus: Lazarus was a mess. He was brought back to life after 4 days. Being covered with a full mummy body wrap wasn't enough to conceal the bloating and stench of decomposing flesh. I suppose his body was "fully" restored.

And,....there are Zombies to consider, too.

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Zombies are the Undead. They have become a fascination with the younger pop culture. I think part of the infatuation is a protest and an observation about society.

The modern zombie is Mindless,... and has an extreme hunger for human flesh. They especially like to eat brains.

However, the horror characteristic has been moderated, in some movies, into humour--"Shawn of the Dead"-- and into a romance, such as "Warm Bodies."

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So,is all this "over the top", just symbolism...or bizarre supernatural facts?

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Perhaps, the dead coming back to life is a bit of all of that, and more.

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The Valley of Dry Bones story, in Ezekiel, is identified as a metaphor. Verse 11 states that the dry, dead bones are the children of God--the House of Israel.

The analogy contains some powerful questions and lessons:

The prophets asks,

"Can these bones live?","....as in "live again?"

Then God says, "Preach to them"--tell them they are dead and how to come back to life.

After Ezekiel preached a great sermon--There was a lot of rattling and movement, but no life.

All preachers need to be reminded of this episode.

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Then, once they were ready, God's breath--The Wind of God--RUAH came to them and into them,.... and the walking dead came to life.

Ruah is the Hebrew word for God's breath of life.

Ruah was there in the Genesis creation story, and active in many parts of the Bible, and....Ruah is still a life giving wind, today.

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The Lazarus experience was a bit different.

Reviving someone was not uncommon, yet a friend restoring a friend is unusual, and....after 4 days,.... was unheard of.

To be sure, Jesus explained that Lazarus' restoration was for a reason. It was to get a point across; it was for the message.

And interestingly, the miracle of bringing Lazarus back to life was NOT embellished or sensationalized. The actual miracle is briefly described in just two verses of this long passage.

Lazarus' *life again* is to show to all that God is in Jesus, and .... this story is also symbolic.

In preparation, Jesus preached to those around him, similar to what Ezekiel did.

Jesus told them that through him is life--Life Now and beyond.

He emphasized that it's God's doing, and that receiving "life" is from God through Jesus.

Jesus was demonstrating and preaching how to receive life / how to be alive / How to come back to life.

Lazarus was the physical illustration as a depiction and as a revelation of God in Jesus.

The purpose was to inform all that new life is possible through Jesus, and this includes all those walking around who are really dead.

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Remove, if you can, the fanciful notion of Hollywood Zombies.

Zombies are the Undead. They appear living, but are not.

They do NOT have the spark of life in them.

The label "Zombie" arose from Haitian folklore. It was told that a sorcerer controlled the movements/actions of his undead subject.

Historians believe the zombie folklore was symbolic for slavery.

A zombie was a subjugated / a mindless, hopeless slave...completely under his master's control.

The story "12 Years a Slave" references such slaves. They are the people who have lost their spark for life; they have no hope, no will, no passion. They are completely submissive like a well trained dog.

That is what a Zombie represents.

A zombie is someone who is being controlled and has surrendered the spark of life.

They appear to be functional.

They perform their duties, and they respond to stimuli--threats and desires,.....yet the zest for life--the spark is absent.

They are controlled. Missing is the joy, the grace and the creative passion.

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There **are** Zombies among us.

I saw a very creepy and telling sight in the Minneapolis airport. Everywhere, at every side table and every bench were attached iPads. They were even bolted down on the tables at restaurants for each person to use. The iPads were the menus. Katherine and I had to place our order using the iPad, and 20 minutes later, a human,... I think, brought the food to us. The iPads were right in front of us, and blocked our view. Conversation was impossible, and after the order was placed, the iPad became a portal to the internet. So, no need to talk.

It was creepy, because, all around, most everyone sat silently staring at a screen in front of them. It was as if they couldn't help themselves. They were controlled,.....and we were forced to go along, too, ...at least at the restaurant. In defiance, I pulled out my iPhone and did some texting. : )

There are lots of things that control us--that eat out our brains.

For example:

External entertainment is required, anymore, because of our dullness.

No longer is it a delightful exception. Most people can't find inspiration or joy by their own creative abilities. They need to be constantly entertained. They need external input.

That includes Sports which has been hyped up by the media to a controlling level.

People's identity and vitality are sometimes wrapped up in "their" team.

It is nearly an unforgivable sin for the daughter of an Alabama fan to marry someone who is an Auburn fan, and I'm not joking about that.

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This week, look around, look for those whistling down the street, or even skipping.

I'll make the challenge simpler: count how many people have a contented smile as they go through their day, or how many share a cry with you or give you a long comforting hug?

It's not like we live in a country that controls information.

We do have free and open elections for all, and they are carefully monitored without political influence. So, it seems surprising that so many are apathetic.

Yet...Nevertheless, dullness, hopelessness, depression, stress, anxiety and fear is ubiquitous. Most people are existing, but not really living.

And, this is not a new scourge.

It was a problem in Ezekiel's time and when Jesus walked the earth.

Moreover, it doesn't have to be that way. People don't have to go around as Zombies. This is Not what God intended for humans.

There is a better way. Life -- New Life is possible.

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Our Lent journey has been encountering and witnessing God's message for us, mostly through the life and teachings of Jesus.

The first Sunday of Lent was the temptation of Jesus--a demonstration on how to resist surrendering one's life into bondage.

Then we witnessed Nicodemus' tripping over how to be reborn.  
The next Sunday presented the encounter of the Samaritan woman discovering living water. She learned how and received new life.

Last Sunday featured the Blind man who received sight, and how those who thought they could see, really couldn't.  
They were like zombies.

And again, we have a similar message with Lazarus regaining life and dry bones living again.

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Obviously, this reoccurring theme is important....for us and everyone.
It is message that shows us how to be alive / how to be reborn.
It is the Gospel message. It is God's passion for you and me.
And, it is truly amazing how difficult it is for people to get it.
Apparently, being raised from the dead is no simple feat.
I suppose there are too many things that suck the life out of people, to the point of dullness and hopelessness.
There are so many burdens, so many fears and so many worries.

Even though, we admire the lightness and innocent vitality in children, most people dare not allow themselves to embrace those carefree attitudes. The need for control can turn us into controlled zombies.

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I recall an incident when I was 19. I was co-coaching a Pee Wee softball team. We had just won the league championship, and it was time for a team picture.  
The kids wanted to get on the top podium for the picture, which happened to be the hood of my car.  
At 19 years old, the joy of the moment was more important than most anything else, so I said, "Sure."

All 12 of those kids managed to get on the roof of my car, but the roof didn't manage so well. The roof caved in and was resting on the top of the front seat--a bench seat, but it made for a great team picture.  
A lot of pushing and pounding popped the roof back to its original shape,.....well ...almost. It did have some profound creases in the metal. And, those dents were delightful reminders of a great moment in life,..... until I tried to sell the car.  
The buyer was convinced that I had rolled the car over.  
He didn't believe my story.

Still,.....it was only money down the drain. That's all, and I never regretted taking that team picture.

Yet,.....I don't think I would allow it to happen today, and that realization makes me a bit sad because it shows that I'm being controlled.  
Controlled by the fear of what others would think and controlled by the fear of losing money.

There is a big difference between common sense and being controlled. Common sense allows room for joyous exuberance,.. for frivolousness, for grace.... and for hope.

Being controlled by peer pressure, fear or whatever... is in essence being a slave....or a zombie. And zombie are not free; they're dead. They are controlled.

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So, how does one be born again?
Where can we find that "living water"?
How do we truly learn to see?
How can the dead live again?
Where is Ruah?
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As Jesus said, life can be discovered through him--how he lived and what he taught.

Therefore, rebirth happens when we truly follow Christ: when we serve others, when we stand up for the oppressed and when we respect and are gracious to others, as Jesus demonstrated.
New life happens when we give, when we expose injustices and exploitation, and when we become as children--allowing our emotions to be free.

Jesus showed us how to trust in God and not in money or our own resources.
Jesus taught us to care for and love people, even our enemies, and Jesus said that we need not worry or be afraid,..... but all that takes faith.
Perhaps, faith--letting go of control is the first step to living again.

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To be sure, Jesus always point to God as the source of life.  
God is love and God creates.

I think we breathe in Ruah when we are creative--when we do art, and when we open ourselves up to love.

Breath in love--breath in God.

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And, speaking of love, I love the last thing Jesus said in this story, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Unbind him and let him go.
Take the chains / the burdens and the fear away,... and be free to live.

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Yet, be forewarned, there is a push back.  
When you get home, read the following verses in chapter 11.

Those in power did not like the notion of people being free, and they plotted to destroy Jesus and his message.

Tyrants seek to control people. They want conformity/ submissiveness.

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Beware of zombies. They'll try to suck the life out of you, and one of the best ways is negativism and criticism. Another tactic is fear, and so is the pressure to conform.

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Funerals are sad affairs, yet death doesn't take life from the living.

Only the undead can do that.

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The season of Lent calls us out to choose life.

And, the living unbind the slaves and set people free.

Celebrate diversity.

Let go of the need to control.

Release the passion in your soul, and God will set your hearts on fire.

And, when that happens, the dead will wake up!!!