

**SERMON PREACHED AT ELY CATHEDRAL ON SUNDAY 9<sup>TH</sup> MARCH  
2008 BY VEN MALCOLM GRUNDY**

**Lections:**

**Ezekiel 37, 1-4, Romans 8, 6-11, John 11, 1-45.**

**It is a very great delight to be back with you here in Ely Cathedral. I have many fond memories of my time in this diocese and of the hospitality which this Cathedral offered. This sermon should not be a nostalgia trip but the reading about dry bones in Ezekiel takes me back to my college days.**

**I was going to serve my title at Doncaster Parish Church and on the last Sunday of our final term the televised service was from there.**

**We were all sat in front of the TV in the college Common Room for the great event. My new vicar to be, Michael Jackson, came into the enormous pulpit in this massive Victorian building and announced the text – ‘Can these dry bones live’ and one of the television arc lights (this was 1969) exploded behind him. The student Common Room exploded in uproar.**

**In a perverse way much of my ministry in a range of jobs has been to make the ‘dry bones’ of the Church of England come to life. I work now as Director of the Foundation for Church Leadership where we support and encourage senior leaders and their staff to develop strategic work in their dioceses. We have fourteen projects across the country and I am pleased to say that Ely, with Canon Les Oglesby is a partner in one of these. Here we are looking at how new life can come to parishes through the development of Local Ministry Teams.**

**Our Gospel reading for today takes us to the heart of the theme for all of the Sundays of Lent. We have been looking at what it means to get extraordinary responses to ordinary questions about life. We have looked at what it means to be ‘born again’, what it means for ordinary water to become ‘living water’ how the blind can see and the seeing become blind and now today – on Passion Sunday we, the Church of the Resurrection look back to the events of the last days of Jesus’ life and see how a hope-less situation led to surprising new beginnings.**

**St John was a man who meditated long on the gifts which faith can bring. Here he takes a series of seemingly unalterable events and shows how, just like the bread and wine in the sacraments of this service, ordinary things can be made to have extraordinary significance.**

**That is the challenge for us all when we examine our lives and the events which shape us. I think that for me coming back to Ely sharpens memories, some long dead or forgotten and gives them a new significance.**

In his poem called 'Little Gidding' a community near to Huntingdon where some of us laboured hard to form a Team Ministry in the 1980's TS Elliot says,

**We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time**

Mary and Martha knew that the death of their brother Lazarus was a distinct ending.

They may well have heard Jesus talking about new life and resurrection but thought it was for some time in the future. In this story John is saying that new life can be experienced now in many different ways and makes the extraordinary statement 'I am the resurrection and the life'.

Jesus went to Jerusalem to confront a city and this story I want to tell is not only for you and for today, I have used it many times since I was here but it is about an event in Ely Cathedral.

As well as being Team Rector of Huntingdon I was Church Urban Fund Officer for the diocese. The attempt was to raise awareness of the problems of our inner cities and housing estates and to raise a national £18M to fund projects.

We filled this cathedral with people and their stories from across England. People from Cambridge, our market towns and the Fens heard telling stories of urban life and what the churches were doing in being alongside desperate people. Then we had a service, here under the lantern at the end. I was exhausted in running the workshops and was stretched out on a seat somewhere near the back. We came to the bible reading – I do not know if there was a shaft of sunlight or not - but I heard Kate Bouch from the Dearne Valley near Rotherham read from the Book of Revelation about a vision of how life could be. 'And I saw a new heaven and a new earth' and I thought Yes, this is what it is all about.

I just want all those who read the story of the raising of Lazarus to think the same – this is not just a miracle story to stretch our credulity, it is just what happens when faith, and a faith in the suffering, crucified, risen Jesus is put into practice in the world. It is about what can happen when people of faith take desperate, ordinary, situations and transform them through faith in action.

Dry bones can live; hope-less situations can become hope-full. As St Paul says in our Epistle, it is the Spirit which gives life for those who have faith. In our Lenten journey, we the people of faith, are asked to go back to our

**beginnings, to return to the places which formed us, to sit with the disciples around Our Lord at the last Supper, to wait with the women at the foot of the Cross and to walk with the stranger on the Emmaus road and in our searching and enquiring of familiar places to really know them for the first time.**

**(Canon Malcolm Grundy is director of the Foundation for Church Leadership and a former Honorary Canon of Ely Cathedral.)**