

Introduction: He is mostly dead from Princess Bride

I. Bleeding to Death

She was bleeding to death. It started perhaps after giving birth to one of her children. Even with the primitive medicine available at the time they knew the bleeding would eventually stop. It never did. The woman found herself confined to her bed while another took care of the child she had so long sought. For twelve years she stayed home. She was a disgust to her husband, whose desire for her had been curtailed by her condition. In a world before sanitary napkins, her condition was shameful. The stained rags hanging out to dry on the roof were a notice to anyone happening by her uncleanness. Luke tells us that she had spent all her wealth in doctors. Mark expands on her medical care by saying that her condition only worsened under the care of those doctors.

Today she is hoping that this itinerant preacher will do what the professionals have not been able to do. So she embarks on a trip with the possibility of not returning. This is a do or die situation. If for any reason she does not find the teacher in time, she will probably bleed to death. She places as many rags and undergarments as possible under her tunic and sets out hoping that the thirsty Palestinian soil will quietly swallow whatever the rags don't catch. The woman marches on throughout the crowd.

At first her steps are fast and determined. And yet her tenacity as well as her strength are drained one drop of blood at the time. She is bleeding to death. Her steps now falter. With each step her heart struggles to pump the ever dwindling blood supply. As she finally approaches Jesus through the crowd, her knees give away. As she falls she extends her fingers looking for something to grasp, but all her frail fingers do is grace the hem of Jesus' robe.

Before she hits the ground she knows something has happened. Like the miracle of the fish and loaves her blood cells multiply. Her heart beat loudly in her chest, adjusting to the regular amounts of blood. Her strength has returned. Her once soiled clothes, rags and undergarments are cleaned. She picks herself off the street and dusts the dirt out of her clothes. Jesus has healed her. She knew it, and He knew it. Just a few seconds ago she was bleeding to death. Now she is alive and well.

II. Just Dead

By the time Jesus makes it to Jairus' house, his daughter is no longer dying, but dead. The usual people are there: family, friends, neighbors, mourners and morticians. The death of the twelve-year-old hits everyone especially hard. "It is one thing when one of us old hags die," says one of

the old ladies present, "We have lived a happy life, had children, seen our grandchildren. But this little girl had just began to live." Another one says, "She had her whole life ahead of her!" Among the wailing woman an old man shakes his head back and forth. "Parents are supposed to die before their children," he cries in desperation, "That's how things are supposed to be." Jesus tries to comfort them. "She is only sleeping." he says. But they aren't dumb, they know dead when they see it and the little girl is dead.

Jesus asks everyone to leave the room. He stares at the little body under the sheets. She has been reduced to nothing more pale skin stretched over skinny bones. He grabs the once warm hand cooling with every passing second. Rigor Mortis hasn't had time to set in yet. Jesus pats the little hand, ignoring the blue fingernails. "Baby girl, baby girl." He croons to the peaceful dead form. "It's time to get up little girl!"

The eyes are the first to open. Little hands now warm and pink reach up to rub the sleep from the big brown eyes. Jesus opens the door and her parents rush in. They are kissing and hugging her. They are squeezing her and drenching her with their happy tears. The girl yawns. Jesus jokes, "Would someone get that child something to eat." And then imitating an old Jewish grandma he adds, "What are you feeding this girl? She is nothing but skin and bones." Everyone laughs that deep laughter that comes from a content soul. Jesus had brought the just dead girl back to full and complete life.

III. Dead and Buried

This time Jesus did not arrive in the nick of time. There was no hem to touch and no deathbed Resurrection. They probably waited for Jesus to arrive but practicality dictated the Lazarus be put away. In a world without refrigeration dead bodies did not keep well; the two sisters placed their brother in the tomb. The stone used to cover the entrance of the tomb was stained with their tears. Utterly hopeless, they felt utterly hopeless. He who was Lazarus friend and only hope had failed to show. Even after he had been declared dead they had held on to hope. But the husk that their brother had left behind had begun to decay so they had wrapped him in the ceremonial shroud and placed him in the tomb with his ancestors.

Finally four days after Lazarus has been laid to rest Jesus ambles up the road to Bethany. Martha, the oldest sister, walks out to meet him. With tears of pain and regret she looks at Jesus and says, "I know it's not your fault, but I know if you had been here earlier you could have saved my brother." She is the more pragmatic of the two sisters. Martha knew that travel by foot can take time without accounting for road hazards of the day, bandits, random Roman checkpoints, weather, and not to mention the multitudes that follow him everywhere. This isn't Jesus' fault but how much she wishes he'd been there. Jesus tells her, "Don't you know you will see your brother again?" "I know the Lord will resurrect his people on the final days of earth history." To which Jesus answered: "I am the Resurrection and

life." But Martha does not dare take him at his word. Off she runs to find Mary.

Mary seems more distraught. She has always been the emotional one, the one who sat at Jesus' feet. She's at home crying, mourning when Martha rushes in with the news. Mary's face turns red, she bolts through the door with such determination that the people there follow her. When she reaches Jesus she flings herself at him. She cries, she screams, she beats his chest. "If you had been here he would still be alive," she screams as she collapses onto his feet. She blames him, the one that once said, "Neither do I condemn you." He who has saved and healed so many. And Jesus weeps.

"Where did you bury him?" He wants to know. They think he is going to pay his last respects. They make their way to a small cave that has become Lazarus' resting place. "Remove the stone." Jesus orders. Martha, ever so practical, interjects, "Lord it has been over four days! He probably smells." The body has begun to decay, bacteria has begun to return the body to the dust it once belonged to. But Jesus insists. They will see the glory of God he assures them. And so it is that with garments wrapped over the bottom half of their faces, they labor to remove the stone covering the mouth of the cave. When the stone has been removed Jesus looks unto heaven and talks to his father. When he is done he looks into the dark cave and calls out. "Lazarus, Lazarus, get out there. Come forth" And to everyone amazement a mummy steps out of the tomb. Now is Jesus' turn to be practical. He speaks to the stunned mob. "Hey would someone help the mummy out of the shroud? He is suffocating in there."

IV. Dry Bones

It is a strange story in a book of strange stories. That is something to say considering that those include stories about breaking pottery, wheels within wheels, not mourning your deceased wife, and my personal favorite, how to cook bread over dried human poop. Ezekiel finds himself transported in vision to a large open field. This is perhaps the site of an ancient battle or perhaps the site of old massacre. He looks around him and finds he is surrounded by heaps of sun dried bones, human bones. Their life long ago stripped away by the elements.

He wonders why God has brought him here. "Preach to them," the Lord tells him, "Preach to the bones that they may receive life." Like some children's songs the bones begin to arrange themselves. The leg bone's connected to the thigh bone. . . Then like a CGI scene on CSI, muscle and tendons begin to bind the bones. Nervous system, circulatory system, endocrine system, one by one they appear on the forming body. And finally the skin covers it all. But there is no life in them yet. They lay there motionless. "Preach to them about the breath of life." And Ezekiel does. Soon there is a breeze and the crowd begins to stir. Soon He finds himself engulfed in a mass of living people.

I read from Ezekiel chapter 37 verses 11 to 14. vs.11 Then he

said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' vs. 12 Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. vs. 13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. vs. 14 I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.' "

Conclusion:

Hope is such a fragile thing. Hope is what keeps us alive. Perhaps you've come here this morning feeling like the first woman. You are bleeding hope. Bleeding to death. Maybe it started with a happy moment, a change long awaited. Yet at first things were not as you expected and you were disappointed. But you thought, give it time, it will get better. But it didn't. Your spiritual heart is struggling to survive on the ever dwindling supply of hope to all your life.

Maybe only recently you have lost all hope. Just dead. You still can feel the residual warmth of the hope that once ran through your veins. Rigor Mortis has not set in yet. You are here. But your blue lips and rapidly decreasing temperature to your extremities reminds you of your true condition. Hope has left you and is nothing more than a pleasant memory.

But perhaps hope left you several weeks ago and in its place the stench of hopelessness has settled in. It has been weeks since you've hoped for salvation, healing, that one thing you really prayed for and you are beginning to notice a smell. In the absence of hope you have become angry. You find yourself looking for who to blame. If someone had been here. If so and so would have done that. My hope would not be dead. You have withdrawn from the people you once called your friends, from those you once loved. Don't remove that stone, you tell me. Don't go there, Gabriel, you say. You won't like it.

Maybe you are past that point. You have given up. You just don't care anymore. It is almost peaceful looking over the dried bones that once were your hope and dreams. There is no longer hope, but there is no stench either. Just bleached bones.

Let me tell you the God that I serve is stronger than death. I sometimes wake up and feel there is no hope. I get a message of possible good news about the businesses we left behind in the US and have been disappointed by so many vain hopes, that I don't dare hope any more. There is no hope. I can't figure out a way to fix it. The Lord says "I am the resurrection and the life. If any believe in me, even if he is dead, he will come to life again.