

Worship Service Resources “*Bone Dry*”

Lent 4, Year A, 19th March, 2023

Ezekiel 37:1-10 NIV / John 11:1-44 ESV

Prelude

Opening Music (Video)

[*You Raise Me Up*](#)

Selah

performed by Selah, written by Brendan Graham, and Rolf Lovland, CCLI SONG # 4434612, 2002 Universal - Polygram International Publishing, Inc. (Admin. by Universal Music Publishing Group) Peermusic III, Ltd., used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246, posted to YouTube by Luvss2ride

Welcome Guests / Announcements

Passing the Peace

Opening Hymn *Brethren, We Have Met to Worship* 8

Call to Worship (responsive)

One: The Spirit of God has brought us here.

All: The Lord has set us down here, though our bones are tired.

One: Can these dry bones live?

All: Yes! The Breath of God will revive us! The Word of God will awaken us!

One: Today, we come together to experience new life.

All: Let us give thanks to the Wild, Life-Giving Spirit of God!

Invocation

Compassionate God, the wind of your Spirit is the very sign of life for all who long for you. One breath from you and we are rescued from the arid valley of dry bones, given muscles and sinews and joy with which to praise you, and filled with the holy hope you grant to all your faithful children. Let our whole lives be filled with the life-breath of the Spirit, that what has lain dormant may burst into bloom, and what looks to us to be death may be revealed as but sleep before the emergence of new life. Amen.

First Testament Reading (Video)

[**Ezekiel 37:1-10 NIV**](#)

Posted on youtube by [jemima judith](#)

The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.

He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.

He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “Sovereign LORD, you alone know.”

Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!’

This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.

I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.”

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone.

I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’”

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious God, God of all compassion and consolation, your breath alone brings life to dry bones and weary souls. Pour out your Spirit upon us, that we may face despair and death with the hope of resurrection and faith through Christ, our Lord. Help us to dance with the spirit, the breath of life, which calls us out of the valley of dry bones and into the Kingdom of God, both a present reality and the grounding of our future hope.

Holy Father, Father of Christ who revealed the way of life, inscribe your law on our hearts that in this life, we may be the body of Christ. Help our hands to hold the sick and suffering. Help our feet to walk with the poor. Help our ears to listen to those who live in despair. May our eyes be affixed upon the suffering of the cross and the hope of the empty tomb so that we may live as resurrection people.

Sovereign Lord, Father of all in the power of the Spirit, you know our faults and yet you promise to forgive. Keep us in your presence and give us your wisdom. Open our

hearts to gladness, call dry bones to dance, and restore to us the joy of your salvation. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, Amen

Hymn *Spirit of God! Descend* 502

Gospel Reading (Video) [John 11:1-44 ESV](#)

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Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.

So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."

But when Jesus heard it he said, "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."

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

So, when he heard that Lazarus[a] was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?"

Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world.

But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him."

The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover."

Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.

Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.

So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.

Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,

and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you."

And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.

Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.

When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."

Jesus wept.

So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.

Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him,

“Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead 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 lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.”

When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”

The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Message - *Bone Dry*

I'm sure we all have experienced being lost at times in our lives, that sense of not seeing a clear path out of our current situation. Whether it's on a hike, driving in an unfamiliar locale, or losing track of friends or loved ones in a crowd, being lost can fill us with anxiety and fear. It's the loss of control, of not knowing the outcome and often feeling that there is nothing you can do to resolve the dilemma you find yourself in.

In recent memory, we all have a shared experience of being lost. The events that began three years ago in 2020 aren't too far away from our memories. I, myself, just had a reminder last Sunday evening, when I went to preach at Northaven vespers to half the usual crowd, due to a COVID outbreak in the facility. I can remember the experience, the feeling of the rug that has been pulled out from under us, the routines we counted on to give our life a stable foundation were suddenly not available to us. So many of the ways we interacted as a community were suddenly gone, leaving us isolated, and feeling lost and alone. While things have largely returned to the way they were before, there are still shadows of that time in our lives, little things that aren't quite the same. Regardless of what generates that experience of being lost and alone, we usually try our best to find hope and a light at the end of the tunnel, yet all that is often easier said than done. So where do we turn? Where do we find hope in this time when we feel so lost and alone?

Our scriptures this week really speak to being lost and finding hope. Ezekiel was a prophet writing for the Jewish people in exile. People who had lost everything that had defined their lives. They lost their temple, the place where they interacted with their God, their homes, and the very land that they called home. Exiled far away, they knew what it was to feel lost and abandoned. Every constant and routine that they had counted on to give their lives a stable foundation was suddenly ripped away. The Israelites yearned to return home to the lives they had left, yet realized that they may never see that land and life again. They could identify with those dry bones in the desert. They knew what it felt like to be dried out and bleached of all color, the very marrow that sustained them seemed long gone. Like those bones, they felt lost in the wilderness and forgotten.

So too, do Mary and Martha in the story of Lazarus this morning. Jesus was close to them. He spent time there and they considered him not only a wise teacher and Messiah, but also someone they loved and who loved them. Yet when their beloved brother Lazarus became seriously ill, Jesus didn't seem to respond to their plight. They knew him well, and had seen him heal others many times. After all, that was one of his main gigs, healing folks and making them well, both physically and spiritually. Yet here was someone Jesus supposedly loved and was close to dying, and nothing. There was no rush to his side, no miracle from afar. They too found themselves feeling lost and abandoned. They couldn't understand why Jesus seemed unconcerned, why he was apparently kicking them to the curb.

Yet was that really the case? In both these examples, were they abandoned and forgotten? In both cases, the scripture is pretty clear. They were not forgotten. God hadn't given up on them. In fact the argument could be made that they had given up on God. In their desperation and loneliness they felt abandoned. Yet God was present. God had a solution, salvation from their despair.

Too often we think that because we have faith, that means we will never struggle, that we will never face those times of being lost, of feeling alone and abandoned. Yet, that is part of our lives in this broken world. We will have those "dry bones" times, those periods when we feel like dried out and bleached bones in the desert. Those times when we feel lost and alone, abandoned without hope. But we are not alone. We are forever at the forefront in the mind of God. When we feel truly lost and alone, it is often only God who is left there with us. It could be argued that we are never closer to God than in those "dry bones" times. In some ways, it is very appropriate that we should be going through such trying times as the season of Lent reaches its climax. What better time to reflect on those lost times, the "dry bones" times of our lives? When we look back, we can recognize the sense of isolation and hopelessness. But we can also see the promise. We were redeemed, we did pull through those times in our past and found light on the other side. God is always with us and will pull us through.

In our stories today, the Jews did return home; Lazarus did rise from the dead. There is hope that God will provide for us as well. Times that are tough do get better. But our bones will stay dry if we lose faith, if we let that hope slip by. We should also remember that just as Christ brought the promise of renewal to Lazarus, we as the body of Christ should offer hope and comfort to each other.

This is our chance to show what being Christ's disciple is all about. In our story today, the original disciples put their faith in him, regardless of the danger or cost, and recognized the hope and promise found there. Likewise, we can be the hope and promise for those in our community who struggle. We can reach out through the phone and internet and give comfort to each other, to be Christ's comforting presence to each other. I hope and pray we can continue to find ways to be that beacon of love and support we are called to be. As we continue to walk through the deserts of our lives together, may we not lose sight of the community we are called to be, and may the Spirit shine through us to give comfort to a world of "dry bones." Amen.

A Call to Serve

This morning let us reflect on how we can offer hope to those, including ourselves, who may be feeling lost and alone now. How can we offer support, and be the church we are called to be.

A Time for Reflection

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Join Me in Prayer.

O God, accept and bless these gifts which we offer in response to the gracious gift of your life-giving Spirit to us. May these gifts and our lives be used to flesh out your love and justice, mercy and peace as they are revealed in and through Jesus, your Son and our Saviour. Amen

Hymn *Open My Eyes, That I May See* **517**

Benediction/Commissioning

Wait for the LORD!

Hope in the LORD!

Go into the world with assurance, hope and promise:

the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ rest upon you – and even unsettle you;

the love of God, creator and giver of life, embrace you – and even confront you;

and the presence of the Holy Spirit encourage you – and surprise you,

this day and all your days. **Amen**

Postlude