

## WORSHIP FOR THE LORD'S DAY

March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020 11:00am  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

### WE GATHER AROUND THE WORD

PRELUDE: *"'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus"*

-Louisa M. R. Snead, William J Kirkpatrick; ©1997 Word/Integrity Music

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

CONG INTROIT: #627 *"I Love You, Lord"*

**I love you, Lord, and I lift my voice  
to worship you; O my soul, rejoice.  
Take joy, my King, in what you hear;  
may it be a sweet, sweet sound in your ear.**

Laurie Klein; 1978, 1980 House Of Mercy Music; Brentwood-Benson Music Publishing, Inc.  
ccli CSPL157794; ccli 11307856

CALL TO WORSHIP: *(fr Ezek 37; Ps 130:7)*

*O mortal, can these bones live?*

**Only the Lord God knows**

*O people, hope in the Lord.*

**With the Lord there is steadfast love and great power to redeem.**

*Let us worship the Lord our God.*

PRAYER OF THE DAY: **Lord God, Great I Am, you are resurrection and life. As we worship you this day show us who we are; bearers of good news, messengers of resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

CALL TO CONFESSION:

PRAYER OF CONFESSION: **O Lord, if you held our sin against us, who could live, who could stand? We seem to have more faith in death than hope in your promise of life. We seek peace through war and find security in weapons. We abandon the hungry, sick, and dying, and pursue wealth by making others poor. And even so, you love us; still there is forgiveness with you! Therefore we worship you' for you alone, O Lord, can save us from death and redeem us from our sin. Amen.** *(silence for personal prayers of confession)*

DECLARATION OF PARDON: *O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! If Jesus Christ dwells in you, the Spirit of God will be your life and the grace of God will be your righteousness. And if the Holy Spirit dwells in you, then God, who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies. Friends, this is the good news of the gospel; In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God. Amen!*

TIME FOR YOUNG DISCIPLES

### WE PROCLAIM THE WORD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION:

FIRST READING: Romans 8:6-11

SPECIAL MUSIC: *"Be Not Afraid"*

Naomi B. Ingram

First Presbyterian Church- Copperas Cove

-Bob Duffield, arr. Jack Schrader; ©1975, 1978, 1997 Hope Publishing Co. CCLi 11307856; ccli CSPL157794;

Ezek 37:1-14; Romans 8:6-11

March 29, 2020

SECOND READING: Ezekiel 37:1-14

SERMON: "*Shelter in Faith*"

### **WE RESPOND TO THE WORD**

HYMN: #821 "*My Life Flows On*" (*How Can I Keep from Singing*)

-1869 Robert Lowry (Public Domain) ; ccli CSPL157794; CCLi 11307856

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Lord's Prayer: **Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

### **WE BEAR AND FOLLOW THE WORD INTO THE WORLD**

\*CHARGE AND BLESSING

\*SENDING: "*Go Now in Peace*"

**Go now in peace, Never be afraid,  
God will go with you, Each hour of ev'ry day  
Go now in faith, Steadfast strong and true,  
Know He will guide you in all you do**

Don Besig,,Shawnee Press, 2009 CCLi 11307856; ccli CSPL157794;

SECOND READING: Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. 3 He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord God, you know.” 4 Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. 5 Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 6 I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

7 So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8 I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. 9 Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” 10 I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

11 Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ 12 Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 14 I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.”  
This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

FIRST READING: Romans 8:6-11

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit<sup>(a)</sup> is life and peace. 7 For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit,<sup>(b)</sup> since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit<sup>(c)</sup> is life because of righteousness. 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ<sup>(d)</sup> from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through<sup>(e)</sup> his Spirit that dwells in you.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

### ***“Shelter in Faith”***

It was a sad time... around 592 BCE. Jerusalem, the Temple, the nation of Israel were in ruin. There'd been unspeakable loss. The people were in exile, in Babylon. Their unfaithfulness to God and God's ways had let them be conquered, and now they were separated from their Temple, from where they understood God's presence to be. They were utterly despaired, fearing that God had abandoned them, certain they'd never again return home.

The story goes that the prophet, Ezekiel, was given a vision in which he was carried in the spirit to a valley filled with dry bones. It appeared to have been a battlefield from days gone by wherein the dead were left unburied for the buzzards to devour. Scholar Margaret Odell says, *“the sheer number of dry bones suggests prophetic failure on Ezekiel's part, and God's question reminds us of that fact.”*<sup>1</sup> *“Mortal, can these bones live?”* Ezekiel could only respond by saying, *“Oh Lord, you alone know.”* God then commanded Ezekiel to prophesy, promising to bring breath and flesh to the bones. And sure enough, as Ezekiel prophesied, the bones came together with much rattling and groaning, and tissue and flesh appeared on them as well. Ezekiel was told to prophesy again and God's RUAH (Hebrew for breath, Spirit, wind...God's life force) blew upon them and their lungs filled with sweet air. They now were alive. They lived. And they stood up, each upon their own feet, as a great multitude. What a sight it must have been.

But we are called to note another thing...a really important and TIMELY point. The bones, with form, flesh and breath simply stood there! They did not dance and sing as you might imagine they would. They just stood there. (*pause*) Scholars believe this is because they, representing the house of Israel, were simply surviving, not really living. They were in exile, feeling cut off from God and in total despair, without hope. And *“being cut off from God meant they were still as good as dead,”*<sup>2</sup> says Saul Olyan. To this, Ezekiel offered a simple metaphor of divine presence, that is, the ready availability of the breath, the ruah. The word is mentioned no less than 9 times in the passage. Ezekiel was, in essence, telling God's people

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Odell. *“Commentary on Ezekiel 37:1-14”*. [www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2070](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2070). (accessed 3-27-20).

<sup>2</sup> Saul M. Olyan, *“We are Utterly Cut Off: Some Possible Nuances of ngzrnu Inu in Ezek 37:11,”* *CBQ*65 (2003):43-50.

that “*despite their fear of being cut off, despite their despair, God was as near to them as their own breath*”.<sup>3</sup> His vision didn’t change the reality of their current trouble. They were still in exile, mourning the loss of their loved ones, missing their homeland, feeling the pain of it all deep in their souls, but they were now reassured of God’s presence, God’s life-giving force was being inhaled with every one of their breaths, and God’s abiding love for them as forgiven and precious children surrounded them. And this made all the difference. It gave them firm and certain hope for a future...for a future with God...in their own land.

You know, this Bible story has much to say to us today in our situation. We too are in a sad time, in real trouble right now. The whole world has changed in a matter of weeks and things just seem to be going from bad to worse. The near future is frightening. As shelter in place orders expand, layoffs increase, as we settle into the realization that we really don’t know when we will be able to embrace one another again, when we will find grocery store shelves fully stocked, when we will see something other than ever worsening graphs and ever-rising numbers on the news, when we can quit worrying about our family and friends, some on the front lines in this battle, some sick, some dying. It’s easy right now to feel despair. It’s easy to feel as though we have been cut off from God. But ...but if we’re still...if we listen....we will hear...we will feel... the RUAH!

Barbara Brown Taylor tells about the time that she spent 3 days on Barrier Island where logger head turtles were laying their eggs. She writes, “*One night while the tide was out, I watched a huge female turtle heave herself up on the beach to dig her nest and empty her eggs into it. Afraid of disturbing her, I left before she had finished. The next morning, I returned to see if I could find the spot where her eggs were hidden in the sand. What I found were her tracks leading in the wrong direction! Instead of heading back out to sea, she had wandered into the dunes, which were already as hot as asphalt in the morning sun. A little way inland, I found her exhausted, all but baked, her head and flippers caked with dried sand. After pouring*

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<sup>3</sup> Linda M. Alessandri. “*Second Sunday of Advent. Valley of Dry Bones.*” <https://havenlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/December-10-2017-Sermon-Can-these-Bones-Live.pdf> (accessed 3-27-20).

*water on her and covering her with sea oats, I fetched a park ranger who returned with a jeep to rescue her. He flipped her on her back, wrapped tire chains around her front legs, and hooked the chains to a trailer hitch on his jeep. Then I watched, horrified, as he took off, yanking her body forward so that her mouth filled with sand and her neck bent so far back I thought it would break. The ranger hauled her over the dunes and down onto the beach. At the ocean's edge, he unhooked her and turned her right side up. She lay motionless in the surf as the water lapped at her body, washing the sand from her eyes and making her skin shine again. A wave broke over her, she lifted her head slightly, moving her back legs. Other waves brought her further back to life until one of them made her light enough to find a foothold and push off, back into the ocean. I watched as she swam away.*"<sup>4</sup>

Yes, friends, there are times that we find ourselves lying in the hot sun, baking, wondering if we will survive. Things go from bad to worse. Our lives get flipped upside down we get dragged along, feeling as though we are being choked by the ever-mounting sadness of circumstances that we did not choose nor did we bring upon ourselves. But then the ruah... then the ruah...we hear it, we feel it rushing upon us. We are flipped right side up again and it floods over us, refreshing us, giving us hope for a new day, reminding us that we are not alone. No, WE are not alone.<sup>5</sup> It moves us beyond surviving to living, and we can swim into the future. That is what this passage does for us today! We are being reminded and refreshed and renewed with the truth in the word of God. Ezekiel is doing it for us right now. He is prophesying again...this time...to us, right?

Brothers and sisters, the Church, the body of Christ, is charged to share the truth that we know. This church, FPC, is doing it right now in so many ways...donating for the preparation of hygiene kits, used for those recovering from disasters, preparing caring casseroles for those who may find themselves in need of a meal, calling and checking on those in assisted living centers, weeping with ones who have suffered loss, writing cards or delivering groceries for

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<sup>4</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, "Preaching the Terrors," In: The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching (Zondervan, 2005). Quoted by William Willimon, "Pulpit Resource, Vol. 42, No. 2, Logos Productions inc. 2014, pg 15.

<sup>5</sup> Linda M. Alessandri.

some weathering this crisis alone, providing extra financial support for parents who've lost their jobs, working extra shifts when on the frontline because, that's what needs to be done. Yes, the church witnesses the truth in wonderful ways. And when it does "the bones rattle".<sup>6</sup>

But the most wonderful way that the truth can be witnessed is for the Church to affirm what is pointed to in this passage. That is, that our God is a God of life! Life here and life after. Just as real as tribulation is in the world, God in Jesus has come to show us that it doesn't win. Evil doesn't get the last word. Jesus said, "*Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*" He has overcome the world with a love so great that the grave on that first Easter morning could not hold it. And because of this, we can live our lives now, with such things as a global pandemic swirling around us, knowing that there will be a day when every tear *will be wiped away, disease and pain, even death will be no more and all things will be made new*". And that makes all the difference! We can live, really live with every fiber of our beings, not just survive. And not only this, but the Church can witness to the truth that God is with us. God in Jesus even now walks with us, weeping with us in our pains, our sorrows, our fears. The risen Lord has not abandoned us. No, GOD has not abandoned us, but is there to sustain us. And knowing this makes all the difference too. (*pause*) We can breathe, brothers and sisters, deeply. The Church can stand, for all to see, as did those fleshed bones, ready for the future, looking forward in hope."<sup>7</sup>

This morning, I encourage you to breathe in the ruah. Breath in the life force of God. May it be what you need in order to (quoting an old hymn) "*be lifted above earth's lamentation and hear the faroff hymn that hails a new creation.*"<sup>8</sup> May it be what you need to remember that "*Easter is a comin in and nothin goin stop it. Death doesn't win*".<sup>9</sup> And may it be what you need to be able to proclaim to the dried bones that are you are blessed to come alongside of,

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<sup>6</sup> Jill Duffield. "Looking into the Lectionary". . <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Looking-into-the-lectionary---5th-Sunday-in-Lent.html?soid=1102135377571&aid=O9hE2bqOPz8>. (accessed 3-27-20).

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Odell.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Lowry. "*My Life Flows On*" (*How Can I Keep from Singing?*) Public Domain. 1869.

<sup>9</sup> Jill Duffield.

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First Presbyterian Church- Copperas Cove

Ezek 37:1-14; Romans 8:6-11

March 29, 2020

those who are yearning to hear during these difficult times the hope-filled words “*I, the Lord, your God, will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.*” To god be the glory. Amen.