

March 29, 2020  
"Dry Bones"  
Quarantine Sermon #1

Ezekiel 37:1-14 (1-6, 11, 14)  
John 11:1-45

The scripture passages for today that Rev. Tussing just shared run the whole gamut of human emotion - from hopelessness and despair, to restoration and new life.

I am especially drawn to the very human Jesus that we experience in the Gospel lesson from John. I'll come back to that in just a moment.

It feels truly timely that our lectionary passages - which were assigned to this date long before our current pandemic - both center on the themes of life out of death,

light from the darkness, and hope in times of struggle and displacement.

The passage from Ezekiel is filled with very stark and vivid images - images of a valley filled with dry bones.

At the time these words from Ezekiel were written, the image of dry bones was a metaphor for the people of Israel who had endured much - they had witnessed the destruction of their city and temple, been dragged off into exile, and then found themselves living in a foreign land. They cry out saying, "Our hope is lost; we are cut off completely."

Into this picture of hopelessness, however, comes the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel prophesies to the people that God will breathe on them so that they will live.

Where the people have experienced a spiritual death, God promises to put God's spirit within them, giving them new life.

In the Gospel lesson from John, we also see a spirit of new life and the breath of God.

The familiar story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is rich with theological images and themes. But as I read through this story once again, one particular verse really jumped out at me.

In the story from John, Jesus' good friend, Lazarus, is gravely ill. But by the time Jesus arrives at his home, Lazarus has already died and been placed in a tomb. Noting the despair of those around him who are mourning Lazarus, the scripture says that Jesus was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

And then verse 35 says, "Jesus began to weep."

A very human Jesus, despite his belief in the transformative powers of God and the spirit, weeps for his friend, and weeps for all those who mourn. He is, as the Gospel states, disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

At a time when we, too, are disturbed in spirit and deeply moved by all that is happening around us, it feels reassuring to me to know that even Jesus wept.

It is not a sign of weakness or lack of faith to mourn those we have lost. It is very human, as we weather these storms together, that we may struggle and question and long for a time when we, too, can return once again from exile.

And so, here is the good news. That same spirit of God that breathed new life into those dry bones in Ezekiel, is promised us as well.

The threat to our physical health and well-being, of course, is real. We still have much to weather in these days and weeks ahead.

But I am comforted knowing that a spirit of new life can be breathed into even the driest of bones.

Allow me to share a very simple story as I conclude.

After my husband's death four years ago, some good friends gave my children and me a very wonderful gift.

It is a huge set of beautiful wind chimes that currently hang on our front porch.

I can often hear the chimes playing when I lie in bed at night and I love the sound.

Every time I hear them it feels like hearing the breath of God, reminding me that God can breathe new life into even the driest of bones.

That is what I wish for all of you.  
AMEN