

Smithfield & Carman  
Email Service  
March 29, 2020

*“Welcome to our email service this week”*

*As we journey toward Easter, our world and our lives have taken on a new direction, as we deal with the current health crisis. May God travel with us all.*

*May the light of Christ be in our midst  
– the light of new life that breathes  
the hope of new life.  
May the Spirit of God dwell in our hearts  
during these times.*

#### **Call to Worship:**

**Can these bones live? Only God knows.  
Our God breathes new life into hopeless situations.  
Our God longs to be a part of us, to live within us.  
Can this church be revitalized? Only God knows.  
Loving God, breathe your Spirit into us, and make us new.**

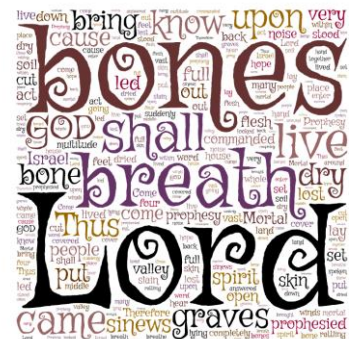
#### **Hymn: Spirit of the Living God**

***Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.  
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.  
Melt me, mould me, fill me, use me.  
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.***

***Spirit of the living God, move among us all;  
make us one in heart and mind, make us one in love:  
humble, caring, selfless, sharing.  
Spirit of the living God, fill our lives with love!***

#### **Lenten Prayer**

Gracious Living God,  
there are times when we feel dry and empty,  
like the dry bones Ezekiel saw in the valley  
Breath upon us, O God, and revitalize us,  
reawaken us, rekindle in us  
the fire of your Spirit,  
that we may share fully  
in the grace and the life you give. Amen.



**Scripture:     John 11: 1-45  
                  Ezekiel 37: 1-14**

**The Raising of Lazarus  
Valley of Dry Bones**

## **Meditation: “The Call to Dry Bones”**

On this 5<sup>th</sup> week of Lent we look at, Ezekiel and the dry bones and the death of one of Jesus’ closest friends. In each case we see God’s power at work, transforming death into new life. The story of Ezekiel and the dry bones is one of the most familiar in the Hebrew Scriptures. The prophet Ezekiel had a vision. He was in the middle of a valley of dry bones when God asked him if these bones would live. The people of Israel were far from home and far from their God. They were dead in spirit. Only God could bring life to their bones.

The bigger picture is of course, that God brings new life into hopeless situations. God has promised to put new life into us. Our hope is in God who never stops creating. There is a calling in these readings – the call of hope in resurrection.

Even those times when we too feel we are running dry or burning out. It is not something that we usually notice right away – for we are often too busy – life gets faster and faster, tempers are short, pressures are cooking, stress levels rise, everything becomes a blur and we are drained dry, especially now during these times of uncertainty. It is during these times when we come to realize even our enthusiasm for the word of God has dried up. Not only can’t our faith move mountains, it is barely crawling in the desert. There is no time for rest and relaxation and there is a tendency to become stuck – we feel there is no way out.

The people in today’s reading are feeling the same way. As captives in a foreign country they had lost all hope. They were all dried up - and they felt all was over. Then here comes God who speaks through Ezekiel to those dry bones of – burned out, tired people.

God asks Ezekiel – “can these dry bones live? Could these spiritually hopeless people, ever find hope again after all that had happened to them?”

For they were feeling like lifeless, dry bones that would only come to life when God’s Holy Spirit entered them. With God’s help Ezekiel brought hope and new life to people who were feeling like dry bones. The same is true for us – when our connection to God is weak, for it is the Spirit that refreshes **our** dry souls.

Most of us have tried those mazes where we follow the right path to find our way out, and as we move the pencil through the maze, we keep running into dead ends, until we find the one path that sets us free.

In the same way, life can sometimes be like living in a maze, as we continue to take wrong turns which lead nowhere. Often, we retrace our steps until we find our way. It can be very frustrating and often we never do find our way out.

Just as Jesus called to Lazarus he calls to us, freeing us from whatever physical or spiritual ailment we may have. To not respond is to be like the poet who wrote:

*“The music I came to sing remains unsung,  
I have spent my days stringing and unstringing the instrument.”*

Imagine how fearful it must have been for Lazarus to step out of that dark cave into the light – yet here was the offer of hope for new life to enter dry bones. Jesus can lift us from us up from our cave – calls us forward – rolls away the stone.

We too are fearful and we hold on to what we know for it is often safer to stay in hiding and remain in our caves than step forward.

Perhaps similar to the situation today with isolation and stepping into that unknown territory of this virus.

About 400 years before Christ, the philosopher Plato contributed this story:

*“Imagine a group of people seated in a dark cave chained down in such a way that they can look only in one direction, toward one wall of the cave.*

*Several yards behind them is an open fire, providing light. Between the fire and where they are sitting is a raised runway along which forms move, casting their shadows upon the wall. The people, chained so that they must face the wall, cannot see the fire or the forms, but only the shadows of the forms. If these shackled people were confined to this view for their entire lives, they would come to believe that the shadows are real creatures. Not knowing anything else, having no three dimensional being to use for comparisons, these prisoners in the cave would believe that the shadows were the real thing.*

*Now imagine that the prisoners are unchained and can turn around to see the fire and the forms which have produced the shadows. Certainly, they would readjust their ideas of reality. Moving about the cave, they would begin to get a sense of the three-dimensional make-up of their environment. They would conclude that they had been previously fooled, and that NOW they know what true reality is.*

*Next, imagine that they are led from the cave into the brightness of a noon day sun. Would they turn away in complete bewilderment, not wishing to face true reality, not wanting to acknowledge that their beliefs when they were shackled prisoners were mistaken - and would they retreat to their cave, preferring its more familiar surroundings to the amazing world of space and sunlight. “*

Can our dry bones be resurrected into a new relationship with God ?

As Jesus calls Lazarus’ dry bones to life and God speaks through Ezekiel, to prophesy to dry bones, may we hear that same call to life – to free ourselves from the dark caves that hold us back. God offers hope to dry bones to be brought to new life, to bring the love of God to a hurting and entombed world.

I share a poem entitled , “Come Out” by Joyce Rupp

*Jesus stood at the tomb of Lazarus - a friend, dead, buried three days,  
and he demanded, “Take the stone away!”*

*But Martha, sister turned in alarm to her friend:  
"No, you can't do that. He can't come out - he's been in there too long."  
That fearful voice of resistance has echoed through the ages,  
leaving fragments in our souls; "you can't find a new life,  
'You've been dead too long. Don't think you can change now."*

*The old message repeats itself to those life-giving parts of us -  
that have died and need to be raised up.  
Many are the names for the dry bones in ourselves  
many are the risings that need to take place.  
Jesus stands at the tomb and calls them out,  
ignoring the loud protest of our inner voice that cries:  
"You can't call that back to life.!"  
Welcome the inner Lazarus, unseal what is entombed,  
and give it an entrance into light.*

We can see God at work in the ordinary, mundane and routine aspect of our lives  
- we can experience the new life that is offered.  
- for where there is the breath of the Spirit there is life.

Let us Pray:

*Lord, you bring us the hope of new life. As disciples we have a responsibility to speak the word of hope and promise to the dry bones of our communities and to others. Breathe your Spirit of life and hope in us - that we may be knit together with your grace and love to choose the way of life as we journey toward resurrection and beyond. Amen.*

Prayers for all of us:

O God, too often we find ourselves distracted by the rattling of dry bones. We often feel overwhelmed and ignore your call to be bearers of hope, and we ask can these dry bones live? When we find ourselves in a spiritual desert, give us stillness of mind to be able to discern and know your life-giving presence.

We are thankful for for Jesus who comes to us in love to weep over us, and raises us up showing us the hope of resurrection presence in our lives. We thank God for the spirit that clothes our dry bones with new flesh, offering us the breath of life. Loving God, whose Spirit gave breath to the valley of dry bones – whose touch healed the lame, and whose word raised the dead, hear our prayer today that your breath will touch our heart with new life.

We thank you that you hold each living thing close to your heart. We turn to you with our concerns for one another, with our concerns for the world especially at this time dealing with the Covid19 virus. We pray that you will offer your comfort for all who are ill, hospitalized, in nursing homes or staying at home in isolation. We pray for those who deliver necessities for shut ins and friends, for those on the front lines, as we offer ourselves as Christ's voice to call new life in the church and the world, as we pray in Jesus' name.....

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

### **Commissioning and Benediction**

*With every breath that breathes  
through our own dry bones,  
with every beat of our hearts,  
with every smile and tear,  
we offer our prayers.  
May we find healing,  
may we find hope,  
may we find God,  
in the tears, the smiles, the beats, and the breaths,  
for ourselves and for others during these strange times.  
May God's blessing rest up us;  
may Christ/s love dwell within us;  
and may the Holy Spirit move among us,  
disturbing and comforting, in the days  
that are to come. Amen*

***May God bless and keep you safe.***