

Fifth Sunday in Lent - March 29, 2020

Readings: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

Presbyterian World Service & Development Litany:

(Written by the Rev. Iona MacLean - The Church of Saint David, Halifax)

God set the prophet down in a valley of dry bones
asking, **“Can these bones live?”**
commanding, **“Hear the word of the Lord,”**
promising, **“I will put my spirit in you, you shall live.”**

Jesus wept at the tomb of his friend
hearing the grief, **“Lord, if you had been here...”**
knowing the doubt, **“Could not he...?”**
commanding life out of death, **“Lazarus, come out!”**

We are tempted by hopelessness and despair
in our own pain,
at the world’s brokenness,
saying, **“Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost.”**

Lord, have mercy
Christ, have mercy

Lord, have mercy

Let us pray:

**Creator God, we wait for you and in your word we hope.
For with you is steadfast love and great power to redeem.
Help us to trust you
and to share your resurrection life
with all people and the whole creation.
So may all be raised from despair to hope,
from darkness to light, from death to life;
through Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life. Amen.**

Psalm 130: 1-2, 5-6 (NRSV)

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

² Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

John 11:32-35, 38-39, 43-44

³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵Jesus began to weep.

³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Reflection:

Out of the depths, the Psalmist cries to God for help.

Psalm 130 is a lament rising from the darkest part of the valley of the shadow.

Yet, somehow, even in the midst of despair and defeat, the psalmist knows that God is attuned to the most extreme circumstance of human need. God hears the cry.

We are surely in the depths these pandemic days:

the depths of fear, of uncertainty, of anxiety, of boredom, of exhaustion.

Lament rings true. Contrary to some people's "power of positive thinking" view of faith, it is not unfaithfulness to God nor a denial of the good news of the gospel to insist that the world must be experienced as it really is and not as fantasy. The faith of Israel as expressed in the Psalms says that there is nothing out of bounds or inappropriate in conversation with God. Biblical faith is trust in a God who is present in and attentive to the darkness, weakness and displacement of life.

In the depths, Jesus (Emmanuel meaning God-with-us) weeps at the tomb of his friend. His troubled spirit is a foretaste of his struggle and grief in the Garden of Gethsemane as he nears the cross and his own death. What we see in Jesus in the depths is that there is no situation where God is not present, there is no human experience outside of the knowledge of God--and most importantly, there is no place beyond the love of God.

So the psalmist, even in the depths, waits for God, hopes in God's word.

And in the depths the Word-made-Flesh creates life in a graveyard:

"Take away the stone," he says. "Lazarus, come out!"

And the dead man comes out.

Jesus says to everyone watching, "Unbind him, and let him go."

It's a community endeavour: this life, this liberation, this love in action.

So as we wait, in these days of physical distancing and self-isolation, we are nevertheless not alone. As fellow citizens, "We are in this together" and doing our part for the well-being of

all, from hand-washing to phone calls, from helping our neighbour in need to prayers for those on the front lines.

Even more, we are in this together with God. God-with-us, Jesus, calls us into the community endeavour to transform death to life, to free one another, to love one another, to live our lives on the basis of the abundant and liberating life that Jesus offers the world.

We wait, we wait for God, we hope in God's word. We wait together--even if temporarily apart. We wait,

grounded in resurrection life,

united in the life-giving, inclusive love of God embodied in our Crucified and Risen Lord,

motivated by the promise in God's transforming word that life wins.

Thanks be to God!

Prayer:

Living God, you have made your love known in Jesus Christ who raises people out of the depths,

from despair to hope, from darkness to light, from death to life.

When things seem bleak to us, frustrating and hopeless,

when we feel overwhelmed as we are even now during the COVID 19 pandemic,

when we feel cut off from you,

you are there breathing life into us so that we may rise and be your faithful people.

Thank you for your never-ending grace and for the victory you have won in Jesus Christ over all that would harm us.

God of compassion, in every place bring healing to the sick and the injured;

courage to the anxious and the distressed;

love to the lonely and the abandoned;

hope to the discouraged and the exhausted;

comfort to the grieving and the heart-broken.

Be with those who are especially vulnerable in these days:

our David's Place guests and all who lack adequate shelter and food,

those who are ill and those who struggle with the limitations of age,

those who are without income due to the pandemic,

those under pressure to make the right decisions, including government leaders and public health officials.

Grant us all patience as we wait; grant us all courage as we serve you and care for one another; grant us all hope as we trust in you for the future.

We join our praise and our prayers with your people in every time and place, grateful for our unity in Christ with them, and for your promise of life abundant for all; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you.
Amen.*