

**Breath of God**  
**Ezekiel 37:1-14**  
**Rev. Shannon A White**  
**Wilton Presbyterian Church**  
**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent | March 29, 2020**

What a time we've continued to be in... it's enough to get any one of us rattled to our bones, or at least to tempt us to be rattled to our bones... Thank God, literally, for the Scriptures, and for communities of faith which remind us in times such as these of the importance of being grounded in God and connected to one another. Our faith in God reminds us that no matter what is happening, we will ultimately be OK. As has been true throughout the millennia, the scriptures tell us God will never leave us or abandon us, and that love overcomes death in any form.

But there's no doubt about it: These are stressful times. This week I was reading a blog post by Rev. Jan Edmiston, the current presbytery executive in Charlotte, NC and former moderator of the national Presbyterian church. The title of her post: *"That Moment When We burst into Tears."*

I guess on some level I must have needed permission, because in just having read the title, something in me let loose and the floodgates opened. And I admit, the cry was a big ugly cry, if you know what I mean. All of my pent-up anxiety and sorrow for what people are feeling and dealing with, including for myself... came out. BUT, I must say, after the tears... which really didn't last long, I felt much better. I could breathe deeply again, and I could get back to focusing on what I needed to do, care for our people and be present for others.

My meltdown was probably nothing like what I would imagine the prophet Ezekiel might have felt when he looked out into the valley and saw a vast sea of dry bones strewn across the landscape. Momentary overwhelm at the sight before him...

Maybe he was considering, as we might: Where is the hope? Where is the life which will come from this suffering? The destruction to what we have known and experienced as normal... Where is the hope in the midst of utter fear and isolation so many of us are feeling? And what about those who are sick, and those who have lost loved ones due to the coronavirus?

The scriptures say as Ezekiel looked out and took in the barren sight, God said to him "Mortal can these bones live?" "I will cause breath to enter you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and will cover you with skin, and put breath in you and you shall live. And you shall know that I am the Lord." (Ezekiel 37:5).

Life coming out of situations which looked utterly bleak...

The first case of the coronavirus in Wilton was also the first reported case in Connecticut. Maybe you've been following the story which was first shared on a GoFundMe page started by the man's wife.

The story goes, that this man Chris, in his 40's, had gone to a cybersecurity conference in northern California at the end of February. That was right as this virus had already been spreading, unbeknownst to many, and before it was named as a pandemic. Chris came home and boom... COVID-19, the deadly virus being blamed as the culprit for the world's current crisis, hit him and hit him hard. He was admitted to a local hospital and immediately put into a medically induced coma due to pneumonia and other complications. The description of his situation was described with no information as to his identity except to show a picture of him with his twin infant boys. His wife said they had recently moved to town and had connected with a faith community.

Chris' wife, self-identified as a per diem nurse was obviously worried sick, and rightfully so, because her husband, who is in his 40's, has significant underlying health issues. She was quarantined at home with the babies and unable to see her extremely ill husband.

Her plea on the GoFundMe page, created only on March 10<sup>th</sup>, was to ask for financial help, knowing she would not be able to work, and Chris' recovery would be a long, arduous path... if he would even survive.

I gave a donation... as did many others. In fact, one thousand six hundred other people... have raised a fund to the tune of 104.5 thousand dollars to help support this man hardly anyone knows.

A month into the campaign, I noticed the updates to the page began to shift. There were more pictures posted. Pictures of Chris and his wife during their wedding were added. More pictures of Chris with the babies appeared as well as personal

information such as Chris' love for Star Wars... His wife saying, "May the force be with you" is one of his favorite sayings.

And then this week, Chris's wife granted a couple of interviews with local media... and the family revealed their identities.

Elizabeth thanked each and every caregiver and medical provider at Danbury hospital by name... she thanked her faith community, members of the community of Wilton who had reached out, their babysitters and more. She said,

*"My husband has a long road of rehab ahead of him to work on cognitive difficulties, muscle atrophy, weakness, speech challenges, and decreased lung capacity to name a few. But he is a Tillett, a fighter, and a lovable teddy bear with two sweet boys and me to come home to..."*

I thought about this... and other reports of those who have tested positive in the area. I've read about accounts where there are those, who, perhaps out of fear have remained isolated and held back from sharing of their plights perhaps because of either shame in feeling that they might have done something to bring this on and exposed others, or out of legitimate fear of those in the broader community who might blame them and thus face backlash. Either way, the result has been devastating to them and it has kept people isolated.

The people out in exile said, " Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely." And God said to Ezekiel, "Tell them, 'Thus says the Lord, I am going to open your graves, o my people; and I will bring you back you the land of Israel."

In Chris Tillett's case, his wife Elizabeth and her family were **brought back to life**, through their faith and the community which responded to them. Life was literally breathed back into them through their connection with others in their faith community and beyond.

As a result, she has been able to give back to others who may still find themselves in the wilderness of the valley of dry bones, cut off and alone without hope. Her courage to share her story is remarkable to me. I thank her and I thank all who have reached out to her.

The wilderness is a metaphor we see throughout this season of Lent. We began with Jesus being led out into the wilderness for 40 days, facing temptation before he would begin his life-changing work of healing and working to transform lives.

In Exodus 17, the story of the Children of Israel, wandering in the wilderness after leaving Egypt tells us how the people quarreled because they were restless and thirsty. God gave them water.

In these days of COVID-19, we've been in a wilderness as well. Perhaps, you, like me, have been faced to look at all sorts of things in ourselves, in our relationships, in our lives. How are you coping?

Do you need life breathed into you so that you may live again and then may be of service to others?

Do you need a shift in perspective from what you don't have... to gratitude for all God has given you to be able to survive in this moment?

Do you need the courage to reach out to others and name those things which are keeping you isolated so that breath might come, once again, into you?

Thus says the Lord God: Come from the Four Winds, O breath, and breathe upon these, that they may live. Breathe into us, Breath of God. You know the hymn:

*Breathe in me breath of God; fill me with life anew; that I may love what thou dost love and do what thou wouldst do."*

May it be so...alleluia! Amen