



Westminster Presbyterian Church
Eugene, Oregon
“At Home” Worship
Fifth Sunday of Lent: March 29, 2020

Gathering Around God’s Word

If you are worshipping with another family member or with children, you are invited to have different voices share and read the various parts of the service. You can also call/FaceTime someone to worship together.

Call to Worship from Ezekiel 34

God said, I myself will search for my sheep and I will rescue them from having been scattered in a day of clouds and thick darkness,

We praise God for gathering us into himself.

God said, I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak.

We thank God for healing care.

God said, My sheep will live in safety and no one shall make them feel afraid. You are the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God.

Let us worship God.

Opening Hymn *My Shepherd Will Supply My Need* #803

Call to Confession

Our God is loving and forgiving. God does not choose separation from God's children, but rather desires reconciliation and reunion for eternity. Let us confess our sins so that we may choose eternal union with our God

Prayer of Confession

Holy Father we confess that we do not live in faithful obedience but pursue our own desires. We desire eternity with you, but spend our time and talents on earthly concerns. We ask forgiveness for our transgressions and seek reconciliation and unity with you.

(Prayers may continue in silence).

Assurance of Pardon

By the mercy of Christ, our sins are forgiven. Jesus Christ did not come to condemn us, but to redeem us. Thanks be to God for eternal love and mercy.

The Word

Prayer for illumination

Holy Father, with the power of the Holy Spirit please help us hear your message of hope. Help us believe and be strengthened in our response to your call. Give us a spirit of community with each other and fellowship in our journey together. Give us joy in our hope that soon we can celebrate worship in a common space together. Hear our longing for the communal experience of singing songs of praise, hearing the reading of your word, and praying the issues of our heart in worship. Shine your light of shared presence on this isolated experience as we worship today. Amen

Scripture Readings

Old Testament Reading: EZEKIEL 37:1-10

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. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones,

hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 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.” 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. 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. Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, 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.” I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

New Testament Reading: John 11:1-3,17-27,38-44

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The 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

Karen Young
Commissioned Lay Pastor

The way we structure our daily activities has surely been impacted this month. However, the seasons of the church remain steadfast from year to year. Next Sunday is Palm Sunday and a week later the celebration of Easter. At the time this document is prepared I do not know how those celebrations will be done. However, the message of the season is unchanged. The Easter story remembered in our minds and hearts is our personal worship as well as the theme of public gatherings.

It was just over a month ago that we remembered the reason for this season in the imposition of ashes. And the words of Lent's beginning reminds us that as sure as we have been born, we will return to the dust from which we were created. We have shared in lessons and devotions and disciplines that remind us of our lost and dependent state. Also reminding us of God's promise of provision and cure and victory over all our problems since the sin and separation of Eden. We are even given the promise of the eradication of eternal death and the gift of eternal life. God has planned this victory since the separation of sinful man from sinless Eden. In scripture we have foreshadowed pictures of

God's ability to reverse physical death. The lectionary passages today have two of those examples. They are both favorite scriptures for children's stories. I challenge the adults today to search deeper and answer the question: Is God telling us that God can speak physical life into existence from nonliving, dead molecules?

In Ezekiel, God really wants to get the attention of both the prophet and Israel in a picture that foreshadows a promise in the power of the message. In the chapters before chapter 37 the beginning words are, "And the word of the Lord came to me." In chapter 37 the beginning words are, "And 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". God is going to teach by demonstration, not just by lecture.

Scripture records that the valley was "full of bones, very dry bones". A dry bone has no attached connective tissue, or covering, or bone marrow. A dry bone is only the remaining structure formed as a support from molecules like calcium. A dry bone has no living properties.

Now God asks the prophet to prophesy to these dead bones a command to behave in ways they have no natural ability to do in their dead state. Except God also enlists the presence of the Holy Spirit to breathe life into them so they will live. Ezekiel prophesies and the rattling sound of dead bones organizing in anatomical order with sinews and flesh upon them appears. But there was no 'life' in them. God calls the Breath of Life "upon these slain, and they lived". God's message to Ezekiel was a symbol of the dead state of the nation of Israel at that time.

Early in Jesus ministry the dead son of a widow in Nain is raised. Jesus had compassion on this widow I am sure, but I believe this miraculous act was to glorify God and show Jesus as having Messianic powers. Had I been there I think I would have thought, if he can do this for this young man, can - and will - he do that for me?

The second passage is of Lazarus' death, four days in the tomb, the stench of death present and two sisters and many friends grieving. Jesus is soon to be in Jerusalem and facing his own death

and burial, and he is also grieving the death of Lazarus. Jesus had told the sisters of Lazarus that if they believed they would see the glory of God. Jesus then commands: "Take away the stone." "Lazarus come out." "Unbind him, and let him go." And Lazarus lives more days on this earth.

When the living metabolic actions of a body stop, and the tissues and organs cannot perform, the process of life stops. As a physician, what amazes me most about this story is that not only does Lazarus get up and breathe, and his blood begins again to circulate and his heart begins to beat; but his brain functions restart with the memories of Lazarus. Not only is function restored, but also personal identity. And I believe that as Jesus has done that for the glory of God and a victory of life over death for Lazarus; that not only physical resurrection, but a spiritual resurrection to restore us to live with God is coming in the picture of the events of the crucifixion, the death, burial, and Jesus return to life on earth and his return to Heaven. But that is the celebration story in two weeks!

On a lighter note, and not meant in any trivializing manner, I want to close with a conversation from Ash Wednesday. The day after Ash Wednesday, a spiritual older female wrote in an email to a group with whom she shares spiritual conversations on a regular basis:

Ashes to Ashes and Dust to Dust - Isn't that rather harsh, God? And, God answers - Oh child, I can do miraculous things with dust.

Praise our God who has power over all things and desires us to be in God's presence. Amen

Let us say what we believe by reciting the Nicene creed which was chosen based on the statements about death.

Affirmation of Faith

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Responding to God's Word

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for your blessings and care and comfort in this unique time in the church and our country and the world. The connectivity and the communal nature of the larger church is a reminder that we are not alone. We thank you that we can bring our concerns and our joys to you in prayer.

Today we pray for your guidance and care for our world and local leaders as well as for the health care workers and social agencies that are called to heavy service in these times. We pray for those whose plight of health, and food, and shelter, and support is made more severe by our current crisis.

We pray for our faith communities as we are called to be an example of Your message of hope and comfort to those who are

searching for a spiritual presence in their life. Call the workers to this task and equip them in this need.

We pray for the personal concerns of people and issues in our lives and minds and hearts. Hear us now as we say those personal concerns to you.....(share in personal prayer)

Lord hear these prayers.

We pray for your presence and care for all those who are anxious, weary of spirit, without hope, with sadness. For the aged and infirm, the widowed and orphaned, the isolated, the poor and unemployed. For those who are with sickness, suffering, and oppression.

We also celebrate the gifts you give us. The gifts of your creation of food and beauty. Your gifts of hope and comfort. Your promise of the forgiveness of sin and of victory over death and an eternity of existence in your peaceful kingdom in your presence.

For all of these issues and our private concerns shared with you, let us pray together the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

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.

Sending of God's Word

Closing Hymn: *There is a Balm in Gilead* #792

Charge and Benediction

In our times of need, remind us that our God has power and healing over all illness, infirmity, disability and death. Remind

us that our God desires to not only be King and Ruler over all, but also desires to be the searching and providing shepherd. Remind us that our God is in celebration of all penitent returning prodigal children and is the host for the eternal heavenly feast of praise when sin and death and separation from God will be no more.

And in our remembrance of the above, send us out in your service to those in need with the power of the Holy Spirit, the comfort of Jesus Christ, and in the Glory of God's name. Amen.