

Good Sunday morning from a cloudy hill in Rockport.....

My words here will be brief. I will copy below and attach a worship service for this morning. I want to thank all of you reading my meditations each day, and reading through these "Sunday morning worship services." You have given me a focus. You have given me a reason to think beyond my own personal angst about the situation we're all in right now. You have written back to me with your thoughts about how you're getting through this challenging time. You have given me hope. You have caused me to smile. You have shared of yourselves, so that I can feel comfortable sharing of myself with you. Thank you. We'll press on. I know we'll each do our part in supporting one another and offering our prayers and more to those beyond our immediate circles of families and friends. Let me know if there are more ways I can be helpful to you. Let me know if there are others you think would like to be receiving these meditations from me. And remember.... stay home.... stay well.... stay positive.... stay hopeful....

"Hope is the thing with feathers  
that perches in the soul  
and sings the tune without the words  
and never stops – at all....." ~ Emily Dickinson

Blessings to all this Sunday morn..... Susan

**A simple online worship service for Sunday, March 29, 2020  
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet  
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**



**Opening Prayer**

Enlivening God, you bring life to dry bones and weary hearts.

We cry out from the depths....

in this time of worldwide catastrophe – help us!

Pour your Spirit into our hearts so that,

trusting in your power to forgive and restore,

we may rejoice in the hope you set before us.

We begin in the name of the One, and the many,

You have sent to show us the way to new life in You.

Amen.

**An Affirmation of Faith**

In the midst of hunger and war

we celebrate the promise of plenty and peace.

In the midst of oppression and tyranny

we celebrate the promise of service

and freedom.

In the midst of doubt and despair  
we celebrate the promise of faith and hope.

In the midst of fear and betrayal  
we celebrate the promise of joy and loyalty.

In the midst of hatred and death  
we celebrate the promise of love and life.

In the midst of sin and decay  
we celebrate the promise of salvation  
and renewal.

In the midst of death on every side  
we celebrate the promise of the living Christ.

Amen.

\*from the Iona Community,  
offered in a worship service at  
Bangor Theological Seminary, January 25, 2011

**A Reading of Scripture – Ezekiel 37:1-14  
according to the traditional Hebrew text,  
from *The Jewish Study Bible***



The hand of the Lord came upon me. He took me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the valley. It was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many of them spread over the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, “**O mortal, can these bones live again?**” I replied, “O Lord God, only You know.” And he said to me, “Prophesy over these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! Thus said the Lord God to these bones. I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live again. I will lay sinews upon you, and cover you with flesh, and form skin over you. And I will put breath into you, and you shall live again. And you shall know that I am the Lord!”

I prophesied as I had been commanded. And while I was prophesying, suddenly there was a sound of rattling, and the bones came together, bone to matching bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had grown, and skin had formed over them; but there was no breath in them. Then He said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, O mortal! Say to the breath: Thus said the Lord God: Come, O breath, from the four winds, and breathe into these slain, that they may live again.” I prophesied as He commanded me. The breath entered them, and they came to life and stood up on their feet, a vast multitude.

And He said to me, “O mortal, these bones are the whole House of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone; we are doomed.’ Prophesy, therefore, and say to them: Thus said the Lord God: I am going to open your graves and lift you out of the graves, O My people, and bring you to the land of Israel. You shall know, O My people, that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves and lifted you out of your graves. I will put My breath into you

and you shall live again, and I will set you upon your own soil. Then you shall know that I the Lord have spoken and have acted” – declares the Lord.

### **A sermon based on Ezekiel 37:1-14 – “Mortal, can these bones live?”**



Will you pray with me. Life restoring God, we learn of you today through the mighty words and deeds of Ezekiel, a priest of your holy household, a prophet of your calling. Help us to be open to his beckoning of your people to renewed life, even though his words affirming your presence were spoken so long ago. Amen.

There’s an elephant in the room. It’s called the coronavirus or covid-19. We’re in a mess. And the days only seem to get messier with each turn of the page from one day into the next. What to do? What to think? Where are we to turn for some signs of hope and new life in the midst of this worldwide pandemic the likes of which we have not seen in any of our lifetimes.

It’s hard to get away from it, isn’t it? I can take a walk with our dogs and forget about it for a little while. I can work on the latest jigsaw puzzle on our coffee table and forget about it for a little while. I can enjoy a delicious carry out dinner from one of the local restaurants we’re trying to support and forget about it for a little while. And then it comes back – the latest news of how many new cases of covid-19 in new places in our country, in Maine... how many more thousands of deaths around the world... It’s hard to know what to think about all of it... When something happens that has never happened before, how do we proceed? How do we wake up from this bad dream, and move into a new day?

Into a similar state of upheaval, some two thousand five hundred years or so ago, give or take a few centuries, the prophet Ezekiel received his call from God. And as soon as he hung up from that first holy telephone call from God, he began to proclaim oracles to the Israelites who had been banished from their homeland.

In the second chapter of Ezekiel’s writing we read of the Lord’s directions to him, “Mortal, go to the house of Israel and speak my very words to them. For you are not sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel – not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to them, they would listen to you. But the house of Israel will not listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me; because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart. See, I have made your face hard against their faces, and your forehead hard against their foreheads. Like the hardest stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; so do not fear them or be dismayed at their looks, for they are a

rebellious house. He said to me: Mortal, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart and hear with your ears; then go to the exiles, to your people, and speak to them. Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God’; whether they hear or refuse to hear.” (Ezekiel 3:4-11)

And so back and forth Ezekiel receives these holy telephone calls from God for another thirty-four chapters or so until we come to Chapter 37:1-14, our text for today. “This passage has captured the imagination of readers of the Hebrew Bible for centuries.... More than 80,000 references to this biblical passage can be found on Google, including drawings, paintings, and illustrations from as early as the third century. Few parts of the Bible offer richer material for visualization and imagery than Ezekiel and the valley of the dry bones.”<sup>1</sup>

How do we hear Ezekiel’s words today, on this fifth Sunday of Lent, in this time of worldwide catastrophe? Are we willing to hear the hard words Ezekiel speaks to the Israelites in his early chapters? Or are we the people of “hard foreheads and stubborn hearts” who refuse to listen to the modern day prophets among us? In the midst of our despair concerning this deadly virus, can we hear and abide the words of the scientists and medical experts as they try to explain over and over again what needs to happen in order for this pandemic to come to an end?

How do we hear Ezekiel’s question to God in the metaphorical valley of dry bones, the dry bones of the people of Israel.... “can these bones live again?” (Ezekiel 37:3) Can we believe that the worldwide catastrophe we are experiencing will come to an end? Can we have hope in the midst of so much human devastation?

God responds to Ezekiel yet again and says, “Prophesy over these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! Thus said the Lord God to these bones. I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live again....” (Ezekiel 37:4-5) And Ezekiel proclaims, “I prophesied as I had been commanded. And while I was prophesying, suddenly there was a sound of rattling, and the bones came together, bone to matching bone.... The breath entered them, and they came to life and stood up on their feet, a vast multitude.” (Ezekiel 37:7, 10)

I don’t know about you, but I find expressions of hope and new life in Ezekiel’s words that renew for me the promise of God’s presence among us, even in this most catastrophic time.

The book of Ezekiel ends with these words, “These shall be the exits of the city: On the north side, which is to be four thousand five hundred cubits by measure, three gates, the gate of Reuben, the gate of Judah, and the gate of Levi, the gates of the city being named after the tribes of Israel. On the east side, which

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<sup>1</sup>Katherine E. Amos, in commentary on Ezekiel 37:1-14 in *Feasting on the Word, Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Year A, Volume 2, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, p. 122.

is to be four thousand five hundred cubits, three gates, the gate of Joseph, the gate of Benjamin, and the gate of Dan. On the south side, which is to be four thousand five hundred cubits by measure, three gates, the gate of Simeon, the gate of Isachar, and the gate of Zebulun. On the west side, which is to be four thousand five hundred cubits, three gates, the gate of Gad, the gate of Asher, and the gate of Naphtali. The circumference of the city shall be eighteen thousand cubits. And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The Lord is There.” (Ezekiel 48:30-35)

In other words, my friends, God is everywhere, and all people are God’s people, and God will not give up on any of us, no matter how dry our bones, no matter the hardness of our foreheads or the stubbornness of our hearts. No matter the deadly power of a virus that continues to sneak its way into too many bodies around the world, we will survive this pandemic and hopefully come out the wiser and more grateful for each other and for each breath we take. Can these bones live? God says, “Yes!”

Let the people say, “Amen.”

**A Pastoral Prayer for Sunday, March 29, 2020**  
**from the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church**

Composed by Rev. Dr. David V. Calhoun, CT/Western MA District Superintendent  
Ezekiel 37: 1-4; Psalm 130 (UMH 848); Romans 8: 6-11; John 11: 1-45

O holy one, we pause to express our appreciation for another day of life, and to give thanks for the privilege of participation. We are learning more about the complex interconnectedness of our world. We are learning more about the ways in which we human beings are a part of that interconnectedness.

As we learn more, our sense of awe increases and our understanding of personal and corporate responsibility expands. We are challenged to make our part of this connectedness that which is most harmonious with your way and purpose. We are made to realize that all of life is a source of religious nourishment and that religious faith is expressed in every aspect of our living.

We long to feel a closeness to you. With these thoughts in mind, we remind ourselves that we come to you for spiritual nourishment. We humbly ask for the spiritual gifts that we need for today and for all of our tomorrows. When we are weary and feeling isolated, and when our spirits are dry; sharpen our awareness and teach us to pray.

Touch us with a fuller sensitivity to the fact that it is in you that we live and move and have our very being. Strengthen and nurture us so that we will increasingly become better participants in the experience that we call life. Give us a consistent kindness and compassion for others.

As our spiritual needs are partially met through the communication of our spirits with you today, may the spiritual needs of the world be more fully met through the communion of our common life.

We thank you for every word of truth which has come to us through the life and ministry of Jesus. We trust that this spiritual inspiration can make us more nearly what we can and ought to be. Restore our faith, renew our visions, and lead us to a better world. Be our God and be our Guide.

We express this prayer in the same Spirit which we believe characterized the life of Jesus. We pray in your name. Amen.

### **To hold in our prayers this day.....**



From our bulletin this past Sunday and more....

Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Fred Bagnall, Harriet Williams, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Sally Harjula, Elliot, Trish Perry, April DeVarney, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, George Ng, Eve Anderson, Mimi's Uncle Doug and Aunt BJ, Heather Van Buskirk, and Muriel's grandson Jared.... and all those affected by the coronavirus and the families of those who have died from the virus. *Please send me the names of those you would like for me to add to this list next Sunday!*

### **A Benediction**



*May God bless you and keep you.  
May God's face radiate upon you  
and flood you with grace and tender mercies.  
May God smile upon you always  
and cover your life with peace.  
Amen.*

**Readings from the RCL (Revised Common Lectionary)  
for next Sunday, April 5, 2020 – Palm/Passion Sunday**



Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 21:1-11 for the Palm Sunday reading; Matthew 27:11-54 for the Passion Sunday reading

**Words for the day from [www.gratefulness.org](http://www.gratefulness.org):**

*“It is when we are confronted with...poignant reminders of mortality that we become most aware of the strangeness and wonder of our brief life on earth.”*

~ Kathleen Basford

*“There must be always remaining in every life, some place for that which in itself is breathlessly beautiful.”*

~ Howard Thurman