

March 29 2020 – Fifth Sunday in Lent

Welcome to Everyone for our second online worship service. A few notices first about church in time of covid-19:

- **We have been mandated to close the church by Public Health until further notice. We will continue to keep you updated on Facebook and via our website as we are able, as well as by telephone.**
- **You will find this worship service most helpful if you read the sections out loud at home 😊 And sing along 😊 Brad also recommends looking up other lyric videos that pop up - Glory to God at home 😊**
- **Although the church will be closed, voicemail will be (remotely) checked regularly, and if you need a telephone visit or help, please do call 519-653-4721 the church number or 519-588-7701 Pastor. Both numbers have voicemail.**
- **As far as possible, the regular work of the church is continuing. We are trying to figure out a good way to keep bringing worship services together. Lay leaders are meeting as much as possible using online meeting tools, and this past week, Vision in Mission Ministry and Council met to examine how we can keep moving the work of exploring missional redevelopment possibilities forward, even inch-wise, in this time of lockdown.**
- **Bonnie Scott continues to prepare and share information as widely as possible for those who do not have internet access. Brad continues to come in and practice. I continue to visit, via telephone, to accompany where ever possible, and to prepare worship materials. Alex continues to bear the responsibility of treasurer and encourages us to remember to care for our church expenses during this time as well – he says selling maple syrup is a good way to occupy our time 😊**
- **We will very likely go through Holy Week and Easter without physically meeting, and I hope for an Easter service whenever we are allowed, by Regional Public Health, to re-open our doors. We will continue to provide worship material as long as we are able.**
- **Please stay in touch with each other. Call each other. Visit on the telephone, and where safe, through closed glass doors, and across fences. Let us know how we can help if you are shut in but need groceries or something delivered. Keep safe, and keep on praying. Think of this time as our time in the tomb, with our Saviour, from which we will be delivered soon 😊**
- **May God bless you and keep you safe ...**

Confession: A Prayer During COVID times.

During this season of Lent, much has changed in our world.

We want to visit and hug and hold hands.

We want to throw open our arms and our doors, sit together.

And we are called to respect the nature of this virus and refrain from contact.

We know that we are incapable of keeping each other safe through our own efforts only.

We confess of our weakness in keeping safe distances, in maintaining social isolation, in keeping the vulnerable ones as safe as possible.

We confess of our weakness in NOT reaching out by the means available to us: by telephone or internet, to encourage and cheer each other up.

We confess of our weaknesses in keeping strong faith and the encouraging message of eternal life in the forefront of our consciousness. We confess of succumbing to despair and the dark invasion of news into our Christ-enlightened consciousness.

Forgive us of these ways Holy God.

Forgive us of our need to be in control, to hold on to old ways, and help us in our submission to the requirements of this time. **Amen.**

We hear the assurance of God's forgiveness:

Jesus Christ on the altar holds God's doorway ever open.

Jesus on the cross ensures we have a way home, where all is love:

Through his broken body, through his blood that was shed,

We are welcomed back into our home with God

Who receives us with love,

Forgiving and renewing us every time we knock.

Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Kyrie Eleison: (#23 Sing the Circle Wide) (Haiti)

Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison.

Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison.

Sauvez moi la vie, O Jesus je vous prie, Kyrie

Sauvez nous la vie, O Jesus je vous prie,

Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison

Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison.

(you can listen to the Kyrie on youtube here – dancing is encouraged ☺)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDHQoSfX-RQ>

Greeting

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

Prayer of the Day: *(we pray together ... where-ever we may be)*

All-powerful God, you sent Jesus to set us free from human brokenness and mortal death. Breathe into us the encouraging, accompanying power of your Holy Spirit. Help us to experience the reassurance you give in life everlasting. Help us to shoulder the weight of the cross of these times, following the example of Jesus, our Redeemer and Way-Maker. Amen.

The Gospel Reading: John 11:1-45.

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." But when Jesus heard it, he said, ***"This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."***

Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? ***Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them."***

After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

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." When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.

Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

When 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." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 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."** Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. (NRSV)
Word of God, word of life. ***Thanks be to God.***

Psalm 130 represented in song ... Wait For the Lord (Taize)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvrrF50GBeQ>

The Epistle Reading: Romans 8:5-11

Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God's action in them find that God's Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life. Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, ends up thinking more about self than God. That person ignores who God is and what he is doing. And God isn't pleased at being ignored.

But if God himself has taken up residence in your life, you can hardly be thinking more of yourself than of him. Anyone, of course, who has not welcomed this invisible but clearly present God, the Spirit of Christ, won't know what we're talking about. But for you who welcome him, in whom he dwells—even though you still experience all the limitations of sin—you yourself experience life on God's terms. It stands to reason, doesn't it, that if the alive-and-present God who raised Jesus from the dead moves into your life, he'll do the same thing in you that he did in Jesus, bringing you alive to himself? When God lives and breathes in you (and he does, as surely as he did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life. With his Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christ's! [The Message Translation]. Word of God, word of life. ***Thanks be to God.****

Acclamation of the Word: Thy Word – lyric video below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FS1LAc5DSCU>

click here for video of reading & sermon:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QN99Pz8Gh0I&t=4s>

The Holy Word according to Ezekiel 37:1-14 ***C: Glory to you O Lord.***

God grabbed me. God's Spirit took me up and set me down in the middle of an open plain strewn with bones. He led me around and among them—a lot of bones! There were bones all over the plain—dry bones, bleached by the sun.

He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "Master God, only you know that."

He said to me, "Prophecy over these bones: 'Dry bones, listen to the Message of God!'"

God, the Master, told the dry bones, "Watch this: I'm bringing the breath of life to you and you'll come to life. I'll attach sinews to you, put meat on your bones, cover you with skin, and breathe life into you. You'll come alive and you'll realize that I am God!"

I prophesied just as I'd been commanded. As I prophesied, there was a sound and, oh, rustling! The bones moved and came together, bone to bone. I kept watching. Sinews formed, then muscles on the bones, then skin stretched over them. But they had no breath in them.

He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath. Prophecy, son of man. Tell the breath, 'God, the Master, says, Come from the four winds. Come, breath. Breathe on these slain bodies. Breathe life!'"

So I prophesied, just as he commanded me. The breath entered them and they came alive! They stood up on their feet, a huge army.

Then God said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Listen to what they're saying: 'Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone, there's nothing left of us.'

"Therefore, prophecy. Tell them, 'God, the Master, says: I'll dig up your graves and bring you out alive—O my people! Then I'll take you straight to the land of Israel. When I dig up graves and bring you out as my people, you'll realize that I am God. I'll breathe my life into you and you'll live. Then I'll lead you straight back to your land and you'll realize that I am God. I've said it and I'll do it. God's Decree.'"

(The Message Translation)

The Gospel of our Lord. ***Praise to you, O Christ.****

Message (imagine Pastor Janaki's voice here!)

In the midst of these days of COVID, we are trying to find ways to keep bringing the enlivened word of God to each other. Heide asked if I would record the sermon, and I realized for me, preaching is an activity that happens in community ... I couldn't preach to a video camera, I needed to have at least two or three gathered with me, live, so first I want to say thank you to the patient ones who logged on early to a zoom meeting so we could record this sermon.

The readings for this week are full of juicy readings, and I am hard pressed to keep it short since I also know you don't have to rush home to make lunch ☺ So I will take a little extra liberty to unpack these juicy scriptures today. Beginning with what may seem to be an unrelated story, but one that will illustrate for you how God is using COVID to breathe new life into the dry bones of our community life as church.

Many Canadians use their garages for storing things other than the car.

Me, I park in the garage. Which means I am responsible for closing the garage door when I leave the house in my car. Closing the garage door is such an autopilot action that frequently I drive off and cannot remember whether I have even done it ... I circle back around to check. Did I close the door?

Autopilot mode is when something we do regularly becomes so familiar to us that maybe we take it for granted. Maybe we don't even realize the role that activity plays in our lives. God is speaking to Ezekiel in this scripture about the people of God who have gone on autopilot. Worship and praising God and obedience to God and awe and wonder in God have become autopilot activities.

How does awe and wonder become an autopilot activity you might ask? It is not hard. How many of you can remember the last reading you heard in church? The last prayer petitions? Do you need to circle back and check? Did I close the garage door?

God likens the autopilot church of the time to the dry bones that lie like waste across the desert. And God invites the prophet Ezekiel to prophesy, to call out the message of God to the dry bones ... faith on autopilot, dried up in the desert.

Various things can set our faith on autopilot ... perhaps nothing more-so than a false sense that we are in control of things in our lives. I know I don't tend to reach out to God as much when things are going the way I set them out ... maybe that's just me ... my biggest moments of awakening in Christ, of knowing God's glory happen, not when I am strong and in control, but when I am weak and completely at a loss for what to do.

Enter COVID, stage left.

My awareness of having very little control is profound right now.

My awareness of my dependence on God is at its peak right now.

I don't know when or if my family will be ok at the end of all of this.

All is unknown.

There is no autopilot here.

But God calls us to speak the prophesy of hope and faith into the dry bones of this situation:

Dry bones ... newscasts, reports of death and infection rates, reports of gloom and doom, dry bones ... Listen to the message of God.

God takes the dry bones, the sun-bleached autopilot of our faith and breathes new life into us ... the vehicle of church as we knew it is being transformed in this time of COVID. People are calling each other. People are reaching out to each other in love in unprecedented ways. Our sense of individuality and independence is being challenged like never before. People are checking in, checking up, offering help. We are loving our neighbours in many ways better than we were before. I am receiving texts and emails and phone calls: what can I do, Pastor, how can I help.

Here is what you can do: Listen to the message of God.

"Love each other. As I have loved you, so you are to love each other" Jesus said.

And you are doing it. You will rise to this occasion and do more of it because you trust in the glory of God's promise of eternal life, in the midst of crisis.

Easter is not about opening and closing a garage door on autopilot on Easter morning. We may not have Easter services the way we used to, but this Easter, we get to encounter resurrection in a differently lived way: in our souls, when we realize, in the desert, into our dry bones ... God breathes life in Christ. God calls us to share this eternal life, this message of hope eternal with everyone.

How we live in this time is witness to what we KNOW: for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that we might not perish, but have life everlasting.

We bear witness to life everlasting ... Life everlasting is not an autopilot thing, we don't circle back around to check see if we closed the garage door. We KNOW that this is our inheritance in Christ Jesus. That garage door is shut tight. All is well.

The prophet Ezekiel is obedient. He prophesies to the dry bones. And can you guess what happens?

The breath enters the bones. They rise up. They begin to dance and sing.

And God speaks to Ezekiel again ... he says those dead bones are the people of God. They say that hope is gone. They think nothing is left.

But the only thing that has been stripped away is our own façade of control. The only things that have been stripped away are mortal understandings of the way things are. The only things that have been stripped away are our investment in a safety that moths can eat, and rust can destroy.

If you feel burdened and heavy laden with worry, if you feel buried by the disastrous rate of infection spread, and foreboding of death that is to come, God speaks this promise into our fear, into our hopelessness:

I'll dig up your graves and bring you out alive—O my people!
Then I'll take you straight to the promised land.

When I dig up graves and bring you out as my people, you'll realize that I am God.

I'll breathe my life into you and you'll live.

Then I'll lead you straight back to your land and you'll realize that I am God.

I've said it and I'll do it

Jesus says of Lazarus' illness and death:

"This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

We are invited into this resurrection life, into the glory of God by Jesus himself – in the same way Jesus brought life back to Lazarus and his family.

God breathes new life into those whose hope is dried up under the hot winds of fear.

Jesus brings the dead back to life – and where they remain bound by the trappings of mortal death we are called: We are called to unbind the dead in spirit, and set them free.

This is the time when the church on autopilot is no more. This is the time when we get to live what we KNOW – that God alone saves.

This is the time when we are called to keep awake, stay awake, be alert and speak our hope, live our faithfulness into the dry bones of fear – unbind the dead and set them free into eternal life.

Hear the words of Jesus: "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

Amen.

Hymn of the Day - ... Come Alive (Dry Bones) – Lauren Daigle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuCLqoxigNA>

Prayers of Intercession

Awaiting the promised light of God that comes in Jesus, we pray for the church, the world, God's creation and those who suffer ...

God of abundant blessings,

God whose love denies confinement,

Make us true disciples, removing empty piety from our midst.

Make us, your body, an example of Jesus' unbounded love.

We bring forward our prayers for your church, calling them out to you, here:

(pray your petitions for the church and communities of faith in these times)

God of abundance ... Hear our prayers.

Jesus our redeemer and way-maker,

You came for everyone, bringing forgiveness and grace to everyone.

Not one person or nation or place did you leave out.

We pray for our world, our country, our region: so badly in need of all you bear.

We call out our prayers for places that need your healing here:

(pray the places & situations you want to pray for here)

God of abundance ... Hear our prayers.

Spirit of God, mighty counsellor of all creation, you are here.

Where creation groans in pain, where all hope seems lost, you are here.

In carbon footprints, big and small,

In waterways and forests, in garbage dumps and trash heaps, you are there.

Our responsibility for creation and the environment weighs heavily on us.

We call out our prayers for creation and the environment here:

(pray your prayers for the environment here)

God of abundance ... Hear our prayers.

God who comes as Father, Son and Holy spirit, we pray:

For families affected by addictions and suicide,

of which indigenous families are affected in disproportionately high numbers.

We pray for those who are suffering in mind, body or spirit:

we pray for those we name out loud,

and in the silence of our hearts:

(pray the names of those on your heart here)

May we all lean on you for comfort,

God of abundance ... Hear our prayers.

These, our collective prayers, spoken out loud or within our souls,

we bring before you entrusting all into your tender-loving care.

In Jesus' powerful name.

AMEN.

While you listen to the offertory song,
continue your prayers with the words of the song.

Offertory – **Bless the Lord O My Soul**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4Svh-9ohg4>

Offering Prayer

God of all abundance,
 receive our brokenness
 and the offering of our lives.

Take us, who return to you in thanksgiving:
 form us and shape us into a love like Jesus,
 so that we may be love for this broken world.

Amen.

(please remember to send an offering to the church if you are able to do so)

Thanksgiving for our Presence on this Land.

We thank you God,
 for granting our existence on this safe, bountiful, land,
 and we recognize that we thrive here and enjoy life on the traditional territories of the Anishnabe, Neutral and Haudenosaunee people. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER: *(Retranslated from the Aramaic - we pray together)*

O Breathing Life, your Name shines everywhere!

Release a space to plant your Presence here.

Imagine your possibilities now.

Embody your desire in every light and form.

Grow us through this moment's bread and wisdom.

Untie the knots of failure binding us,

as we release the strands we hold of others' faults.

Help us not forget our Source,

Yet free us from not being in the Present.

From you arises every Vision, Power and Song

from gathering to gathering.

Amen - May our future actions grow from here.

(found at orucc.org Orchard Ridge United Church of Christ.)

Sending Hymn It is Well With My Soul

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ln_n3Tt4Yk

Blessing:

May God bless you and keep you.

May the face of God shine upon you with grace and mercy.

May God look upon you with favor

and give you ☩ peace.

Amen.

Have a safe week beloved friends 😊