

KJ Oh Lent V March 29 2020

*“Will these bones live?” (Ezekiel)*

It's a hard reality that we're living in the last couple of weeks. I know that it's been hard for some of you, and maybe not as hard for others, to adjust to a new kind of lifestyle. We are in the 5th Sunday of Lent. This is the last Sunday before we reach Holy Week.

I think that the lection for today is of particular interest to us as we live in a new kind of normal. There's a theme that I have picked up in looking at the scripture that gives us a way of thinking about our situation in relationship to the Jesus story, and particularly the readings that give us Ezekiel's valley of the dry bones and Lazarus' resurrection from the dead.

Certainly in some respects we are living in a valley of dry bones. I live next door--well, across the street—from the Museum of Science and Industry. There's park land here, if you remember. It's deserted. It's absolutely deserted. There are no people walking. There are no dogs being walked. There is no line of taxi cabs waiting to pick up passengers. There's the occasional bus that runs its route, but with no one inside. It's desolate—I'm thinking as desolate as it must have been for Ezekiel to look over the valley of dry bones when God is talking to him.

I'm also thinking about the interesting connection between Lazarus who is put into the tomb and our present reality. The smallness of the tomb. The darkness. The restriction. While we may not be dead physically as Lazarus was, there's certainly a curtailment of our movement—in our freedom, in our sense of what's going on. I opened the window because the temperature is getting warmer, and I can hear the birds. I can hear the birds singing. I can look out and see squirrels running around on the grass. I can feel the breeze of a temperature without

the winter chill in it. And I can't go outside. Spring is happening right now. It's coming. All the signs that we wait for every year are beginning to show. The trees are getting a haze of green that only comes in the early spring. And I am inside.

I wonder if that's something like being in the tomb. Was there a crack or small opening when the stone was rolled before Lazarus arose that let in a sliver of light? Could you hear the sounds of life outside, and yet know that you were stuck in a place from which you could not leave?

Spiritually it's difficult for us to be without people. I find it interesting that this little device here [*picks up and shows her iPhone*] gives us everything we need and everything we need to access. Think of the days before the virus caused this shelter-in-place order. We had everything we need here [on the iPhone]. We still have all of our information. We can look around in the world and see what's going on and catch the latest news. We have connection to any place in the world that we want to go.

Yet I hear stories of people who have gone out in the in the day when there no one was around. They blocked off six foot patches of sidewalk and sent the message around to their neighbors to come out at 4:30. They go out at 4:30 and they stand on their little square that's six feet away from the next little square and they talk to each other and they shout to each other. I hear that there is no talking over anyone, because we have to listen so carefully to someone who is shouting to us from six feet away or further. No one silencing anyone else.

Can the dry bones live? Yes! Our God has the ability to make those dry bones connect to each other, and grow sinew and tissue, and to stand. God can call the spirits from the four winds, and breathe life into these dry bones until they can stand and represent the entire

nation of Israel. God the spirit of all created life has the capacity to free Lazarus from his tomb, to come out and not only be out but be unbound, to be free.

I think in some way many of us long to be free. But there is something from Paul's letter to the Romans, also assigned for today, that I wanted to bring to your attention. In the eighth chapter of Romans Paul writes:

“if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his spirit that dwells in you.”

God's spirit dwells in you. God's spirit dwells in me. God's spirit—who can raise and connect the dry bones in front of Ezekiel's eyes, who can raise Lazarus from the dead, who could raise Jesus from the dead—is the same spirit of life that lives within all of us. Even though it is dark in some ways in our life today, if we can remember that our connection is not through our cell phones alone, but through the spirit of life that dwells in us. We are still connected. We are still alive Like the psalmist we cry out of the depths to be saved, and God will hear us.

Isn't it interesting, as I said before, that so much of our life is contained in the cell phone. We could walk with this device in front of us and be completely oblivious to what's going around, because our focus is on this little device. But isn't it interesting, beloved, that in a time like this, when no contact person to person is advised, we long for that? We haven't lost the need to be connected, individual by individual.

So it is my prayer that when the end of this cloud comes—and it will come; when we are free to move about and be outdoors; feel the wind on our faces and hear the birds; see the budding of the trees up close, it is my hope that we will still think about each other. It is

my prayer that maybe we will be a little kinder to each other, a little more aware of each other, a little bit more grateful for what it means to be connected in community.

So for this last Sunday before Holy Week, I bid you well. The darkness will not last. Our faith tells us that through Jesus Christ. That's how we will live for now--just like Lazarus just like Jesus--in the darkness, separate, and waiting for the life of God to try it again.