

Welcome to Sunday Morning Worship

Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 29, 2020

Good Morning to our members and friends at home,

This resource is intended to be used by individuals and families who desire to set aside a portion of their Sunday for a moment of worship. Please adapt this resource as you wish. You will need to supply your own bible for the scripture lesson.

Prayer Requests: We are accepting requests for prayer (healing, comfort, thanksgiving and others) in the same way we would on Sunday morning. Please send your requests to the Pastor at pastor01089@gmail.com. Requests will then be sent out through our email list to the congregation for our common prayer life during the week. PLEASE remember that all prayer requests received become public knowledge. If you are uncertain if your request for another might be confidential, do not send it.

Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday: The Executive Committee and the Deacons are in conversation concerning these services and the ones that follow. We are watching and monitoring this situation very closely. The initial decision was to close until further notice. When Sunday morning worship is again offered, you will be notified.

And now let us be in worship

A Call to Worship

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:

Such a Way as gives us breath:

Such a Truth as ends all strife:

Such a Life as killeth death.

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life.

Unison Morning Prayer and The Lord's Prayer

Let our morning worship bring our praises to you, O God of all creation. From dust you have fashioned us, from your own being you have breathed life into us, and from your great mercies you have given your Christ that we may walk in all your ways. In thanksgiving, may our time together bring you glory and us your blessing, in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray, saying... *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.*

Prayers of the People

You may wish to add your own prayers for healing, prayers of thanksgiving, prayers for comfort and others. Silent prayer time for your own prayers and prayer requests is also included. The following prayer speaks to the scripture lesson today and the Valley of Dry Bones.

Let us come to God in prayer.

Gracious God, creator of heaven and earth, giver of life and breathe, who gives blessings as a fountain, who showers your people with gifts for your ministry, and who offers wholeness and healing even as we journey to the end of our days, we gather in worship, the young and the old, the contented and the searching, the joyful and the angry, the faithful and the doubting, we are all these things and much more. We are drawn to you, O God, and we are distracted from you. You are like living water, fresh and inviting, and we often would rather wander in the dust of the desert. You call us to relationship, to covenant and community, and we often would rather be disconnected, wandering, each to our own way until we are little more than dry bones. Tired, and parched we become disarticulated husks of the people you call your own. It is the paradox of our natures that just when we could use your breath of life, just when your reanimating spirit would bring us back into the joy of family, and community, just when we need what you have to offer, we turn away, we wander away, we run away, we crawl away. Loving God, in whose presence is balm, in whose Christ is your peace, in whose spirit is comfort and conviction, bring us to those moments of reconciliation and restoration. Help us to hold our heads in our hands, to breathe deeply, to close out the voices and distractions of the world that swirls around us with its compelling and frightening chaos, that in our stillness, in that moment of solitude, when are able to be quiet, that we might focus on listening and be present to you just as you are present to us, that we might find your cool respite from the heat of our lives, and be reinvigorated by your touch. And now in this moment, hear these our prayers....

For healing and comfort for Mary Cromack, who has tested positive for COVID 19 while in the nursing home, and for her husband Ted and grandson Teddy who are now in quarantine.

For healing, even your ultimate healing of bringing one of your children home, for John and Sherry Taylor's neighbor, Bill Bereneson who is now in hospice and for his loving wife Kay.

For all this day who have been affected by this virus, those in isolation, those in quarantine, and those who find their livelihoods threatened. We lift up to you all those are working tirelessly tending to the sick and seeking ways of comfort and cure.

Be with us all in this time of trial and in this moment of silence.....

And so, O God, as we journey deeper into this season of Lent, breath your Spirit into our lives of prayer, breathe your Spirit into our lives for your mission and breath your Spirit into our lives that we will know the love of Christ. Amen

Scripture Lesson: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Our lesson for this morning comes from the Hebrew Scriptures. The prophet Ezekiel began his ministry before the fall of Jerusalem. During this time period he preached God's word of warning. In 587, B.C.E., Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. Much of the city's population was taken away to Babylon and Ezekiel went with them as a prophet to those in exile. Ezekiel assured his people of the abiding presence of God even in a foreign land. To a helpless and despairing, people he brought God's words of hope. After the reading, you may reflect on the story and share your thoughts. There is a set of notes concerning this text for your reflection.

Benediction: Psalm 18

*I love you, LORD, my strength.
The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. Amen.*

Benediction Response:

Were You There?

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble,
tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

Notes on the text

From 1803 to 1815 the Napoleonic wars raged from Europe to the West Indies and from Egypt to India. In Europe, where the majority of the land battles were fought, it was not unusual for armies to fight more than once on the same piece of ground, or to cross the battle fields of the year before as they marched onto new ones. Often the dead were buried in shallow mass graves that offered little permanent interment. When the next army passed by the bones of the dead from the previous battle littered the pastures. One soldier described it this way, “*It appeared that an army of the dead were growing right from the ground.*” Such was the vision of Ezekiel of dry bones. The dead in the valley are long dead. Nothing is left but bones scattered across the valley floor. It is a horrific vision. One that was born out of the context of Israel’s ancient history. In the late 600s BCE, Palestine was a troubled land. Armies marched. Alliances and treaties were made and broken. Kings came and kings went. The faith of the people of Judea had become neglected and forgotten. The covenant with God took a back seat to the cultural and political realities of the day. For a moment, when Ezekiel was a young boy, reforms swept through Jerusalem. The temple was cleansed. Idols to other gods removed and a new order of priests were put in charge of worship. Ezekiel’s father became one of those priests. Suddenly Ezekiel’s whole life changed. Now he was studying for the priesthood. And because of this training the ways of God’s law became ingrained in him. This moment of rebirth in Jerusalem was not to last. After a period of quick changes in the monarchy, the city of Jerusalem surrendered to king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Ezekiel became a member of that unhappy band of more than 4,000 men, women and children who were forced to make the walk from Jerusalem to the banks of the canal Chebar in what is now known as Iraq. It was roughly an 800-mile journey. Ezekiel, the boy from Jerusalem, after losing his home, surviving the march, and living in poverty as a prisoner, becomes the prophet. This is the background to the vision of the dry bones. The dramatic reassembling of those bones and the life that God breathes into them are the images of hope to those people in exile. There is one piece left of Ezekiel’s life that brings all of this into focus.

Like most prophets, Ezekiel was married. We do not know anything about his wife or how many children they might have had. We do know that he loved her. She was his heart's desire. Perhaps, they had made the march into captivity together. Perhaps they had been married by his father in the temple in Jerusalem. Perhaps, they had been able to create for themselves a small safe harbor of family love amid the bitter loneliness of exile. Perhaps. The one thing we do know for certain is Ezekiel loved her. The reason we know this is because Ezekiel wrote about her. But only once. *"The word of the Lord came to me,"* he writes, *"mortal, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes and your heart's desire: Yet you shall not mourn or weep, Nor shall your tears run down. Sigh, but not aloud; Make no mourning for the dead."* Ezekiel continues, *"I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died. And on the next morning I did as I was commanded."* When we consider Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones, we now understand that the vision is both communal, as the bones represent the long dead spirit of the nation whose people are now in exile and extremely personal. For Ezekiel will enter that valley of dry dusty bones himself having found the desire of his heart, the delight of his eye, and lost her in the death of his wife.

Like so much that has to do with God, the message is more than mere words. The message is in the person delivering it. And so, Ezekiel became the message of God to God's people in exile. How does Ezekiel's story, both communal and personal, speak to you today?