

Becoming Alive
Sunday, March 29, 2020
Fifth Sunday in Lent || Pastor Christy Wright

We invite you to light a candle at 9 AM and join us in prayer and devotion

Ezekiel 37:1-14

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, "Prophesy 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, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, 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. Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD."

This week, as I was organizing my fridge and cupboard, I realized that I had several bags of chicken bones in my freezer, bones that I had kept so I could make stock. I figured this would be a perfect project for a long day at home. I pulled out my favorite cast iron braising dish, dumped the bones in, added a quartered onion, a few broken carrots, a good bit of salt, a handful of peppercorns, and dash of dried herbs, covering it all with water, setting the lid on, and heating it over the stove. It didn't look like much, and in fact, within an hour, it didn't taste like much either. But I kept it on the burner over low heat for the majority of the day, and by the time the sun had set, it had become a rich, flavorful stock that would be perfect in soups and stews, used to cook rice in, or simply to sip as a warm drink. It felt extremely fulfilling to take inert, frozen bones that didn't really seem to have any purpose anymore, and give them new life, creating a nourishing something out of what appeared to be nothing.

As we read this scripture, I am reminded of Genesis, Chapter 1 in which a single word from God catalyses the entire world into existence. It is *creatio ex nihilo*, which is Latin for creating everything out of nothing. God spoke, and light became. God spoke, and the stars were set into the sky. God spoke, and plants sprouted. God spoke, and humanity was formed from the dust of the earth. But that dust had no life in it, not until God breathed into it, filling its lungs with life-giving air, and suddenly, everything was made new and possible. And just like that, life took off, and families were born, and the entire human story had its beginning.

In this passage from Ezekiel, the prophet has a vision of walking through a dark, cold valley filled with dry bones, bones that had belonged to people long since gone. There was no evidence of life here. All was empty. All was silent. But God was with Ezekiel, and asked him to speak life into these bones, and suddenly, in the midst of the quiet gloom, they began to rattle. You see, God remembers these bones, remembers who they belong to, remembers and loves them for who they are. And God also re-memembers the bones, putting them back together, re-memembering them from their disjointed existence back together, laying on muscle and skin, and before long, these dusty bones have reassembled into an entire nation.

But the silence overtakes once again. These bodies are quiet. They are still. They are not yet alive; they are simply inert. But they are filled with potential that cannot be underestimated. And with another word, breath pours into them, the divine *Ruah*, the Hebrew word used here that means wind, spirit, breath. And suddenly, these bodies have become alive, moving, breathing, and ready to take on the world.

As we reflect on our own situation, lying in wait for the COVID-19 virus to pass, for us to be able to go about our lives once again, God calls us to life. We are not simply to wade through the valley of dry bones, but we are called to hear God's words spoken to us, words of comfort and peace, but also words of life. What does it mean for us to become alive in God's presence once more? What does it mean to partner with God in creating something out of nothing? How can we be a life-giving presence for someone else in our lives, even when we are physically not able to be with them? And how is God's *Ruah*, God's divine wind, blowing through your life today? How are you witnessing the Holy Spirit move in your home and relationships?

Journaling

I invite you to join in a journaling practice in reflection of the scripture and our call to become alive in God in times of uncertainty and the unknown.

- In what ways are you feeling overwhelmed by the current events of the world? Lay them before God in prayer.
- In what ways are you witnessing life reassemble itself around you? Lay them before God in thanksgiving.
- In what ways do you feel called to respond to God's life-giving power, knowing that we have been given this gift of life through Jesus Christ, and that we are to live fully into God's call?

Construct your prayer to God, lifting up God's character, laying out our petitions for ourselves and the world around us, thanking God in praise, closing in remembrance of God the Creator, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

And now, may the peace of the Lord Christ go with you wherever God may send you; may God guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm; may God bring you home rejoicing at the wonders God has shown you; may God bring you home rejoicing once again into our doors.¹

In Our Prayers. Thanksgiving for: God's hand in medical advancements, Doug's healing, Janet's healing, Lindsey's & Cameron Jeanne's healing. Holding in our hearts: all those affected by the Coronavirus and the health of our world, Bernice, Betty, the family of Bob, Chris M., Dell, the family of Dick Pace, Doris, Eddie, Elsie, Evelyn, the family of Kenneth Gilman, the family of Rev. Prescott Grout, Josh, the family of Judy Bartlett in her loss, Masey and all the pets we love and cherish, Melissa for her shoulder injury recovery, Pat, Paul C.'s mother and family, our prayer shawl recipients, Priscilla, the Reim family, Shirley, Rev. Yohan & Juhee, the United Methodist Church, all those caught in destructive and dangerous weather. Note that this list will renew each month.

Community Announcements

- *SPRC* will meet by phone conference on Wednesday, April 1st at 7 PM. *Ad Council* will meet by phone conference on Wednesday, April 8th at 10 AM. Details on how to dial in will follow.
- **THANK YOU** to Paul Ayers for his many years of service to our church as our treasurer! He has done incredible work for our church. Paul will be stepping back from his responsibilities in June, and we are now looking for a new treasurer. If you are interested in serving, please contact Pastor Christy by April 15th. A Finance Committee Meeting will take place in the second half of April to discuss responsibilities and a transition plan.
- *Offerings* are still being encouraged during this time. Please consider mailing your offering to our church PO box, so that we are able to continue in ministry through Christ for the transformation of the world. Offerings can be mailed to:
George Whitefield United Methodist Church
PO Box 576
West Brookfield, MA 01585
- *Heifer Project* mission is still ongoing. Our Mission Project for Lent is supporting Heifer Project International, an organization that raises funds for economic development for folks in need across the world through environmental sustainability and other methods. We invite you to reach out if you haven't received a Heifer calendar and bank to "feed the hungry and feed our faith" through this effort. Checks can be made out to George Whitefield UMC with the memo line "Heifer Project." See Rev. Nancy Collins if you have any questions. Thank you for supporting this mission effort during Lent!
- *The Sharing Cupboard* is experiencing high volumes of need at this time. If you are able to donate jelly, jam, coffee, or household products such as hand sanitizer, disinfecting cleaning wipes or spray, bar soap, toilet paper, paper towels, or laundry detergent, it would be greatly appreciated.
- For the latest updates on our response to COVID-19, be sure to check out our website at georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com or Like us on Facebook. You can also call the church number at (508) 867-3667 for more information.

¹ Book of Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals