

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
East Moline, Illinois
Pastor Becky Sherwood
March 29, 2020, The 4th Sunday of Lent
Ezekiel 37:1-14, John 1:1-45
“CAN THESE BONES LIVE?”

Dry, separated, a valley of despair and loss, and valley of old deaths, and feared new losses. A valley season of uncertainty, of too much news, of fear, and loss, a world pandemic, and new vocabulary that we speak all the time now: coronavirus, Covid19. We know Israel's lament (v. 11) “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.”

We too seem to be in the valley with Ezekiel.

But did you notice? God is in the valley WITH Ezekiel.

God is in the valley.

God IS IN the valley.

Take a moment to name for yourself, or to those you are worshiping with, or write in your journal: What does your valley look like this Sunday? What does your valley feel like? What does it mean to you that God is looking at the valley WITH you?

And God asks: “Can these bones live?”

And in our fear and anxiety and confusion, we answer with Ezekiel, “Lord God, only you know.” Can there be life in the valley? Can there be hope in our changed homes, communities, country, and world? Can these bones live?

Is God's breath and love and life strong enough for a valley of dry bones?

Both Martha and Mary said to Jesus: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Their question gives us permission to name our questions, our doubts, our fears out loud to God. In the 150 Psalms of the Bible, there are more “Psalms of Lament” than any other kind of Psalm. These Psalms of Lament question where God has gone, they name deep grief, they name fear, they name doubt...out loud to our God who listens. God does not go away when we question, doubt and fear, that is part of the journey of faith! God promises to stay with us and listen.

Knowing God is with you in the valley, with you outside Lazarus's tomb, take a moment to name your fears and anxieties and psalms of lament before our God who listens and cares for each of us. Do not be afraid; God's love is bigger than our fear and anxiety. God is listening with Love.

If you have children and youth at home, help them to name what these days are like for them. Let them take as much time as they need. And YOU take as much time as you need. God is listening.

As Jesus stood outside Lazarus's tomb, he saw the grief of his friends Mary and Martha, he saw the grief of their family, the grief of their community. He was “greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.” (v. 33) And Jesus wept. Let that sink in. Jesus wept. Jesus sorrowed for their pain. Jesus stood with them in their loss and wept.

What does it mean to you, that you are loved by our Savior who is greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved by your sorrow and fear and anxiety, and weeps with you? How does that feel? What do you want to say to Jesus about his weeping with you?

And God says, valleys of dry bones are not my intention, separation and fear and uncertainty are not my plan or my desire for my people.

God says: (vv. 5-6, The Message Translation)

“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!”

Even in a valley of dry bones, rampant anxiety, crushing fear, longing for change and new answers, and the end to Covid19, God says I am the God of life, the God of hope, the God of renewal and new life.

And Jesus said, death is not the end, death is not the final answer. I am the answer. Jesus says: Even as the death toll rises, even as people we know and love may become sick, even as we grieve for the Lazaruses in our lives and in our world, I Am here.

Jesus says: (vv. 25-26, The Message Translation)

“You don’t have to wait for the End. I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all. Do you believe this?”

Let yourself feel, in your heart of hearts, “in your gizzard” as one of my professors used to say, that God is:

the God of the Breath of Life, the uniter of dry bones—covering them with sinews and skin and renewed life, the Resurrection and the Life, the God who promises hope is stronger than a valley of dry bones, Lazarus in the tomb, and Covid19.

What does it mean for you today that God is offering YOU, and those you love, this Hope and Life?

Who in your life can help you feel and know this Hope and Life in Christ?

Who can you help to feel this Hope and Life in Christ?

Let yourself bask in this promised Hope and Life; soak it in!

Jesus speaks this morning to the Lazarus in each of us, Jesus speaks to us in the valley of dry bones, and says:

“Come Out!”

Come out into this day where my Love is stronger than death and fear and anxiety.

Come out into the day where I will cloth you in New Life, Strong Comfort, and Deep Peace.

Come out into the day where I am with you, and Live in the Love that is for you and all the entire world. Amen.