

## *Speak your deepest longing*

*Ezekiel 37:1-14; John 11:1-45*

I truly think that we can all identify with Martha and Mary today, and the anguish they felt at the death of their brother Lazarus. I think we can understand why Martha and Mary cry out, “Lord, if you had been there, my brother would not have died.” What is interesting about what they said is that it acknowledges their faith in Jesus. Even though they are expressing their distress in this moment at the death of their brother, they still hold on to the belief that Jesus can heal him. Truly believing that Jesus is the Chosen One of God was what allowed them to believe in the power that he would have to heal brother before his death. Now, Jesus chooses to return to Martha and Mary out of compassion, and love for the both of them and for Lazarus – even in the face of his persecution. As we discover through this story, Jesus went to show them a sign of God’s grace, so that they could experience – *truly* experience – God’s presence in that moment. When they got to the tomb, Jesus said to Martha, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” And Jesus then looked up and said, “Creator, I thank you for having heard me. I knew you would 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.”

Jesus shows us in his actions that God is always there for us; that God truly listens. The psalmist today also shows us and reminds us that God is always there, when he cries to God in trust, saying, “Out of the depths I cry to you, O God. My hope is in your promise true. I wait for you, God. My soul waits, and in your Word is my hope.” The story of the dry bones, the rising of Lazarus reminds us that God not only gives life, but God restores life, and death will not ever be the last word.

Now, Ezekiel, who is one of my favourite prophets...I believe that his purpose was to warn those in Jerusalem of what will happen to them. But he was also there to tell the Israelites that the Lord will forgive them and bring them home. He was called by God to say to the Israelites, who were exiled, to remind them of the faults that had led them to the predicament that they were in, *and* at the same time, he was called by God to show them a new way forward: to a future of restoration. Ezekiel believed that the future would bring peace and would return them to a sense of being at home. Where they would feel the grace of God.

The dry bones, in the passage from Ezekiel, according to Kelton Cobb, represent “the dusty sense of helplessness that the exiles would ever find their way home.”<sup>1</sup> Have you ever felt that

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<sup>1</sup> Kelton Cobb, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 2, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 122.

dusty sense of hopelessness that you might never find your way back home? What is it in our own lives, and within the lives of this faith community, that are seeking renewal, rejuvenation, resuscitation, rest, and ultimately resurrection? What can these dry bones teach us? What can we learn about ourselves and our relationship with the world from the painful, difficult past that we are called to walk at times?

Upon reflecting on this, and after watching the children so beautifully show us the rattling of the bones coming to life...I think what I have learned of the dry bones in my life is that my feeling this way – feeling parched, feeling desperate and hopeless, that I can't seem to find my way out – it's precisely in that moment that I come to a place where I let go and let God. I feel that there is no other way, and it is in that moment that I place my trust and hope in God again. And much like the psalmist says, "Out of the depths of my pain and suffering, I cry to you, O God. My hope is in your promise." It's a humbling experience to truly let go. To remove oneself from that intense struggle and despair and to simply place your life in the hands of God. It's a vulnerable place to go. To say to God, "I can't do this alone anymore." Or to say to God, "What is it that you want me to do? What are you calling me to do and be in this very moment?" This is the emotional state and the vulnerable place that Martha and Mary found themselves when they spoke to Jesus.

Over the season of Lent, we've been practicing wisdom. We are learning that wisdom comes when we open ourselves to deeper understanding. Wisdom comes when we come from a place of grace, a place of curiosity, a place of vulnerability, where we are no longer prisoners to our impulses and desires. When I think of who are the wise ones in our midst, I think of people who have lived through suffering and pain. People who have moved through struggle and have come to a place of peace, understanding, and groundedness. Wisdom comes often from years and years of trial and error and experience. Wisdom does not come from perfection and being right.

These stories today help us to identify when we are wandering off. They remind us that we need to wander back to God. That we are called back to God; that God is even with us when we have wandered away. These stories can tell us why we may have wandered away from our spiritual home. From our spiritual guide.

Ask yourself this: are you living a life of faith and answering God's call? If not, what are those dry bones sitting there waiting for God's breath to bring them back to life? What are the barriers that are keeping them in that state of noise, of clinking against each other? Are you living life to the fullest, and what does that look like for you? What does it look like for all of us as a community? As a faith community, I feel that we are at the point in this vision of Ezekiel that the bones are together, muscles are on it, the skin is on it and it is waiting for the breath of God, the Holy Spirit, to blow in and through and among us all. Showing us the way. Showing us the way to be rejuvenated. To find a way forward. To serve and thrive in this world as we love one another and all people.

I've seen signs of the Holy Spirit at work in our midst. One of the things that caught my attention over the last little bit was how many of you were interested in the prayer bead practice. How many of you came out to make prayer bead bracelet, and to spend time in prayer. In more and more of the group settings that I've been in, prayer is at the grounding, the foundation of what we do. I've also seen new life in what used to be the Stewardship Committee – the ones that always ask for money? They simply rejuvenated. They switched, they renewed their name to *The Gratitude Team*. And by doing so, the new life and the new opportunities that have come out – the practice of gratitude and the practice of working as a team – has made a huge difference.

What are the other ways that you have seen the Holy Spirit at work amongst us? Where are those moments of rejuvenation starting to sprout? The question we're left with today is how will we work together in renewing our spirits, restoring peace and love in this world, and being completely open to the Holy Spirit descending upon us all? All you have to do is open yourselves. Allow your bones, your body to be open to that Spirit, and trust in God.