

## July 26 Worship Transcript

### Welcome and Prayer – Carol Duerksen

Greetings to my Tabor family in the parking lot and in your homes!

So, this past week we were doing some cleaning at my Dad's house, and guess what I came across?!

Yep, a 1920's flapper dress!

I totally did not expect to find that, and you probably did not expect to see it this morning either! But here we are!

For my family, an upstairs closet revealed an unexpected surprise. For Ezekiel in today's story, a valley of dead dry bones revealed an amazing, unexpected, huge surprise! For all of us walking through the valley of Covid 19, we yearn for, anticipate, and celebrate God's breath of new life in each of us, filling us with hope and assurance that God indeed is acting and bringing renewal. Thanks be to God!

The prayer I would like to share this morning was written by Rev Nadia Bolz-Weber:

Let's pray:

I do not know when we can gather together again in worship, Lord.

So, for now, I just ask that:

When I sing along in my kitchen to each song on Stevie Wonder's "Songs in The Key of Life" Album, that it be counted as praise.

And that when I read the news and my heart tightens in my chest, may it be counted as an invocation.

And that when my eyes brighten in a smile behind my mask as I thank the cashier, may it be counted as passing the peace.

And that when I water my plants and wash my dishes and take a shower, may it be counted as remembering my baptism.

And that when the tears come and my shoulders shake and my breathing falters, may it be counted as prayer.

And that when I stumble upon a Tabitha Brown video and hear her grace and love of you, may it be counted as a hearing a sermon.

And that as I sit at that table in my apartment, and eat one more homemade meal, slowly, joyfully, with nothing else demanding my time or attention, may it be counted as communion.

And all God's people said, Amen!

## **Scripture Reading:** Ezekiel 37:1-14 - Pastor Katherine Goerzen

<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. <sup>3</sup>He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." <sup>4</sup>Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. <sup>5</sup>Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup>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."

<sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>Then he said to me, "Prophecy 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."

<sup>10</sup>I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

<sup>11</sup>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.' <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup>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."

The Word of God for the People of God. ***Thanks Be to God!***

## **Sermon – Pastor Katherine Goerzen**

Things were really bad for God's people during the days that Ezekiel was a prophet. In fact, things were so bad that God's people essentially felt like old, dry bones in a graveyard. Everything that had once given their life meaning had been ripped away from them.

It all began when soldiers from Babylon came to Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside, and these soldiers forced God's people to leave. And because of this, a lot of people died. Those who were left had to leave their homes and go live in foreign lands. But they weren't even all allowed to stay together; they were scattered throughout the surrounding lands. They were separated from friends and family members. They were forced to go live in places that were not familiar to them, where everything felt very different.

They couldn't even worship in the same way, because they were forced away from Jerusalem, where God's Temple was.

They asked, "Where is God in all of this?" They wondered, "Why did this happen?"

It was a very sad and very scary time.

When they lost everything that was familiar and comfortable, they also felt like they lost their hope because it felt like maybe God had abandoned them. They felt like everything that had made their life worth living had been taken from them. And so God's people felt like old, dry bones in a graveyard.

We too are living in times that can feel really sad and scary. There are a lot of frustrating and worrisome things that we hear about in the news. People are being mistreated just because their skin is a different color from ours. The coronavirus has changed our lives completely and it feels like we've lost a lot of the things that feel familiar, safe, and comfortable. People are dying. We can't always get together with our friends and family members like we used to. We can't even worship the same ways anymore.

Sometimes things may feel hopeless. Sometimes we may not be able to recognize God's presence with us. And sometimes we wonder, "Why is this happening?" And sometimes we ask, "Where is God in all of this?"

But this story of Ezekiel reminds us, that even when things feel really hopeless, and sad, and scary, God is still with us, and that God can come and breathe new life even into old, dry bones.

There's a reason why the story tells us that the bones were "very dry." With dry bones, it would seem impossible that there could be any life within them. [For those of us who are fans of *The Princess Bride*, these bones weren't just "mostly dead," they were "all dead."] Nothing good or life-giving could happen to old, dry bones.

And yet, Ezekiel suddenly saw these old, dry bones begin to rattle and shake. And as these bones rattled and shook, they were being put back together, piece by piece, bone connected to bone, until the skeleton was whole again. But God didn't stop there. Suddenly muscles, and sinews, and flesh covered the old dry bones. But God didn't stop there either. Just like God did in the very beginning when God lovingly formed a person out of the soil, God breathed into these old, dry bones, and suddenly, there was new life in them.

Even when things seemed hopeless, God was still there. Even when people felt like old, dry bones in a graveyard, God was still breathing new life. Even when everything seemed strange and scary, God was working for good.

God promised to act for good while Ezekiel was a prophet, and God's promise is still true today. God is still with us, bringing new life, even when everything seems dried up and hopeless. Our God is a God of life. And even when we're hurting or afraid, God is still with us and will not leave us.

Now sometimes it can be hard to see or feel God with us. In my experience, I most often see and feel God through faithful people who are showing God's deep love to others. God sends people to remind us of God's love.

In this story, God sent Ezekiel to remind the people about God's promise for new life. Now Ezekiel had also been forced away from his home, and so he was also going through everything that the others had experienced, such as the loss of his home and everything that had been familiar. And yet God sent Ezekiel to breathe words of new life to people who had lost their hope.

And just like God called Ezekiel, God is calling us to breathe words of peace when people are hurting and afraid. Even when things seem sad and scary, we can remind people of God's love and promise of new life.

God can give new life even to old, dry bones. May we experience God's Spirit breathing new life in us during these days when so much is different and frightening. And, in turn, may we breathe words of peace to others who need this message of hope too.

Sometime this week, maybe when you feel frustrated, or frightened, or like old, dry bones, stop and notice your breath. Take nice, slow, deep breaths. Breathe in, remembering that God's Spirit is as close to you as your very breath. Breathe out, remembering that God is calling you to breathe words of hope to others also.

Part of the book of Isaiah was also written during a time of exile. I invite you to join me in a brief prayer meditation from Isaiah 42:5

Breathe in: "The Lord who created the earth" Breathe out: "Gives breath to the people upon it"

### **Congregational Prayer – Pastor Rosie Jantz**

God of life and breath!

You are the One who breathed life and breath, bringing the worlds into being.

You are the One who breathed life and breath, bringing our Lord Jesus Christ again to life from death.<sup>1</sup>

You are the One who blows breath into our dry bones with your promise – "You shall live!"

We want to live. We want to breathe.

So we come to you, O God, with all that we have and all that we are, mindful of our own exile during these difficult times of social distancing; in these times of grieving and loss.

We simply desire to love you O God.

We are your community, your church, your people, so we come with confidence that you see and hear us and know our deepest longings.

O Lord, hear our prayer.

Thank you God, for healing that comes when we step outside of ourselves to care about others.

Put your spirit within us, and place us where we need to be,  
so that others will come to know that you are the God of Love.

O Lord, hear our prayer.

Thank you God, for Tabor church, and for the work you give us, and for the strength to do it.

-Thank you for leading and guiding the men in their weekly Bible study.

-Thank you for inspiring creative minds who work to bring weekly Bible stories and activities to children this summer; and for those thinking and planning ahead for the Fall.

-Thank you God, for the hunger to learn more about social justice and how to change the way the Church views racism.

-Thank you for the opportunity to serve at New Hope shelter; and thank you for the opportunity to serve in this faith community.

O Lord, hear our prayer.

We are your church, O Christ, and we long to be together for in-person services soon.

But until then, bind us together for the good of your kingdom.

Bless us and make us a blessing to others through the gifts of our tithes and offerings.

Move in us O Spirit of God, for you make all things new.

Amen.

Receive these words of blessing:

May God breathe new life deep into your bones. You shall live!

Go with God's breath in you.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Prayers of Walter Brueggemann "Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth." (111).