



March 29, 2020
Fifth Sunday of Lent

*A family of faith ministering together
in the name of Jesus Christ*

Ministers: Each of us Assisted by Rev. Mark Perry

Organist: Kathy Limon

We Gather In God's Presence

Candle Liturgy

*(written by Sue Browning. **Gathering**, Lent/Easter 2013, pg. 58. Used with permission.)*

Today is the fifth Sunday of Lent. Lent is a time to think about the things that block us from following God's way of loving and caring for this world and one another. Today we will extinguish our fifth Lenten candle. This candle represents envy. As the candle is extinguished, let us pray in silence for God to remove envy within us and in our world that stops us from appreciating the things we have by wishing we had more.

(extinguish candle, moment of silent reflection)

Knowing that God accepts us for who we are, but loves us into who we can be, let us join together in this song,

Gathering In Song MV 85 "Take, O Take Me as I Am" (repeat)

Take, O take me as I am;
summon out what I shall be;
set your seal upon my heart
and live in me

Life and Work of the Congregation – see page ...

Call to Worship

Ezekiel saw a valley that was devoid of life, full of only brittle bones.

**We look out on marketplaces, playgrounds, places of entertainment
that are equally devoid of life.**

God asked Ezekiel, "Mortal, can these bones live?"

God asks us, "Do you think it is possible for life to return to these places?"

Ezekiel answered, "O LORD God, you know!"

We answer, "God, only you know."

God restored the bones to life, and a multitude of people rose from the boneheap.

We have faith that God will restore life to the lifeless places in our time too.

Let us worship the LORD our God.

***Hymn VU 385 "Spirit Divine, Attend Our Prayers"**

- 1 Spirit divine, attend our prayers,
and make this house your home;
descend with all your gracious powers:
O come, great Spirit, come!
- 2 Come as the light: to us reveal
our emptiness and woe;
and lead us in those paths of life
where all the righteous go.

- 3 Come as the wind: sweep clean away
what dead within us lies,
and search and freshen all our souls
with living energies.
- 4 Come as the fire and purge our hearts
like sacrificial flame;
let our whole life an offering be
to our Redeemer's name.
- 5 Spirit divine, attend our prayers:
make a lost world your home;
descend with all your gracious powers:
O come, great Spirit, come!

Opening Prayer (*unison*)

In the garden of Eden you put the breath of life into the man you formed from the dust of the earth. In the valley of the dry bones you put the breath of life into the corpses of the dead. In this place you breathe the breath of life in us, calling us forth from our tombs as you called Lazarus forth from his tomb, yet, we would rather stay entombed in our troubles and fears, than work for a world of peace and reconciliation. We would rather look at pretty sights, than face conflict. We would rather build homes on mountaintops, than enter the valley of hopelessness where so many of your children live. Forgive us, Creator of new life. Unbind every worry which keeps us from living as your children. Help us believe in the good news that you truly love us. Fill us with power to walk in the light of the hope of new life. Amen.

We Are Blessed By God

Hymn VU 382 "Breathe on Me, Breath of God"

- 1 Breathe on me, breath of God,
fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love,
and do what thou wouldst do.
- 2 Breathe on me, breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until my will is one with thine,
to do and to endure.
- 3 Breathe on me, breath of God,
till I am wholly thine,
until this earthly part of me
glows with thy fire divine.
- 4 Breathe on me, breath of God:
so shall I never die,
but live with thee the perfect life
of thine eternity.

Introit to Prayer VU 948 "O God, Hear My Prayer"

O God, hear my prayer, O God hear my prayer; when I call answer me.

O God, hear my prayer, O God hear my prayer; come and listen to me.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

& The Lord's Prayer (*spoken*)

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 sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us;
And lead us not into temptation;
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever.

Amen.

Minute for Mission

White Privilege

Our gifts for Mission & Service work to create opportunities to understand what it means to be an intercultural church. Here is a story about one of those opportunities.

Beth Baskin, Program Coordinator, Social Analysis and Congregational Engagement, in the Church in Mission Unit of The United Church of Canada, reflects on White Privilege:

As someone who supported a delegation to the Global White Privilege Conference in May 2018 and supports the White Privilege Working Group, I spend a lot of time thinking about it.

White Privilege is the norm that allows me to go through my day without really having to think about what I do or say. The systems work pretty well for me. This is a problem.

The problem is that I (and lots of others) can go through life ignoring racism and the resulting oppression and exclusion. I will be a poorer person for the lack of diversity and understanding in my life and faith, but really, unless I go out of my way to be in relationships with those whom the systems exclude, I can live in my White bubble. This choice will give me occasional pangs of sadness for the oppressed but have no real consequences for my day-to-day living.

It is my job and the job of the White Privilege Working Group, among others, to ask the questions that lead us to understand others' cultures and experiences. We must find real, tangible ways to change our church to honour and incorporate ways of being, knowing, and deciding that are not the dominant church norm.

If Mission & Service giving is already a regular part of your life, thank you so much! If you have not given, please join me in making Mission & Service giving a regular part of your life of faith. Loving our neighbour is at the heart of our Mission & Service.

Invitation to Invest in God's Mission

*Offertory Hymn: VU 218 "We Praise You, O God"

We praise you, O God, our Redeemer, Creator;
In grateful devotion our tribute we bring.
We lay it before you; we kneel and adore you;
We bless your holy name, glad praises we sing.

*Prayer of Dedication

God of life, lay sinews and flesh on the dry bones of the gifts that we offer.
Breathe life into them that they may bring hope in our congregation and community,
across Canada and around the world.
In the name of him in whom we have light and life, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Psalm 130 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.
Lord, hear my voice!

**Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!**

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
**But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.**

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
**my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.**

O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
**and with him is great power to redeem.
It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.**

Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-14 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Valley of Dry Bones

37 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. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” ⁴Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath^h to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath^h in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

⁷So 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. ⁸I 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. ⁹Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath:^h Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath,^h and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

¹¹Then 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.’ ¹²Therefore 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. ¹³And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I 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.”

*For those of you who are interested, the Epistle for this week is **Romans 8:6-11** and the gospel is **John 11:1-45**. You can look them up on www.biblegateway.com and search for the passage.....in any translation you prefer (ie. King James - KJV, NRSV, etc.)*

***Hymn VU 611** “Out of the Depths, O God, We Call to You”

- 1 Out of the depths, O God, we call to you.
Wounds of the past remain, affecting all we do.
Facing our lives, we need your love so much.
Here in this community, heal us by your touch.

- 2 Out of the depths of fear, O God, we speak.
Breaking the silences, the searing truth we seek.
Safe among friends, our grief and rage we share.
Here in this community, hold us in your care.

3 God of the loving heart, we praise your name.
Dance through our lives and loves;
anoint with Spirit flame.
Your light illumines each familiar face.
Here in this community, meet us with your grace.

Meditation: "Awaiting New Life"

In his vision, he stood there at the top of the hill surveying the valley that lay before him. It was so bright that his eyes watered. It wasn't just the bright sunshine; it was the carpet of white that lay across the valley that reflected the sun's light that caused his eyes to water. Bones. A carpet of bones. Bones that had been there for some time. There was nary a scrap of flesh or a bit of sinew left on any of them. They were old and dry, sun-bleached and brittle. There were so many of them that it was impossible to calculate or even image how many people had died to make such a carpet of bone. The very thought gave him the shivers.

I felt a little like Ezekiel the other day. We looked out at the skateboard park across the street. No skateboarders. Nobody on a scooter. Nobody on a bike. Nobody anywhere. It was the same at the school playground around the corner. The gate was closed, chained and padlocked. The swings hung still from their chains. The businesses that line the streets of London, closed. Lights off. Doors locked. Pieces of paper announcing that they are closed due to the coronavirus. It is almost eerie to look or walk or drive around with no sign of human life anywhere.

Mortal, can life be restored to these places? Will businesses reopen, or will they go bankrupt? Will jobs return, or be gone forever? Will people venture out of self-isolation, or continue to barricade themselves behind closed doors lest there be a second wave? Will we ever see our friends and our loved ones face to face again, or only through a video screen dimly? Will crops get planted and harvested, or will the next plague be food shortages? Will our churches and Sunday schools fill again? Will our churches return to their mission and ministries, return to God's calling? And how, oh how, will our bills and taxes and rent and mortgages and debts ever get paid?

Meanwhile, the lungs of the planet have a chance to get a breath as the air clears over Asia and Italy and Spain and India. And the waters of the Venetian canals are now running clear, fish are visible for the first time in many years, swans have returned, even dolphins have returned to the coast. Without all the vehicle traffic in our neighbourhood it is much easier to hear the songbirds as they return from their winter haunts. It is easier to pick out where they are, and to spot them. The trees are in bud and the first of the flowers are poking their heads above the surface of the ground. Life is returning to the land. The environment, and introverts, are winning.

God said to Ezekiel, prophesy to the bones and they will come together and I will lay sinews and flesh on them again. Ezekiel so prophesied, and it was so. And Ezekiel was lost in awe and wonder.

Again, God said to Ezekiel, prophesy to the winds, the breath, the spirit, that it may again enter these slain that they may live again. Ezekiel so prophesied, and it was so. A vast multitude stood before him. And Ezekiel was dumbstruck.

And God said, these bones are the house of Israel, lost, without direction or purpose, without hope, separated not only one from another, but separated from me. Nevertheless, once again I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live, and I will place you in your own land, and you will know that I am the LORD your God. And it was so.

Ezekiel was a prophet in the time of the Babylonian exile. His visions are structured around three themes: 1) judgement on Israel (1-24), 2) judgement on the nations (25-32), and 3) promise of future blessing (33-48). This reading is from that final theme – promise of future blessing. And we know now, about 2600 years later, that those promises were fulfilled. The people returned to Israel from Babylon under the rule of the Babylonian ruler Cyrus. The temple was rebuilt under the rule of the Babylonian ruler Darius, who contributed money, materials and skilled artisans to the effort. (just as a side note, the prophet Isaiah calls Cyrus God's anointed (messiah or Christ....pick a language)).

And you ask – so what? What is the point of all this? What does any of this have to do with us? Well, the point is that God made promises to his people, through Ezekiel, and those promises were fulfilled. In our day, God promises to likewise be faithful to God's people, and we can trust God to keep those promises. The scripture lesson is a promise of new life, of resurrection. Even though we feel like we are walking through the valley of the shadow....even though our social landscape looks devoid of life..as sure as the sun came up this morning, God promises us a future too.....a future post-covid-19. What that future looks like....when that future will arrive we cannot know. What we can know is that God is faithful and keeps promises made. What we can know is that this too, shall pass. What we can know is that it is safe to put our faith in God, and that God will be faithful to us. Thanks be to God.

We Go Forth, Serving God

***Hymn VU 586** "We Shall Go Out with Hope of Resurrection"

- 1 We shall go out with hope of resurrection;
we shall go out, from strength to strength go on;
we shall go out and tell our stories boldly;
tales of a love that will not let us go.
We'll sing our songs of wrongs that can be righted;
we'll dream our dreams of hurts that can be healed;
we'll weave a cloth of all the world united
within the vision of new life in Christ.

- 2 We'll give a voice to those who have not spoken;
we'll find the words for those whose lips are sealed;
we'll make the tunes for those who sing no longer,
expressive love alive in every heart.
We'll share our joy with those who still are weeping,
raise hymns of strength for hearts that break in grief,
we'll leap and dance the resurrection story,
including all in circles of our love.

***Commissioning and Benediction**

© 2017 Thom M. Shuman. Used with permission.

Go forth with God's hope!

We have put flesh on our faith and go to serve others.

Go forth to fill others with Christ's Light!

We go to call others to new life, wiping away their tears.

Go forth with the steadfast love of the Spirit!

We go to share that hope for which all people long.

***Sung Response:** "Go Now In Peace"

Go now in peace. Never be afraid.

God will go with you each hour of ev'ry day.

Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true.

Know He will guide you in all you do.

Go now in love, and show you believe.

Reach out to others so all the world can see.

God will be there supporting us with love.

Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.

Announcements.....

April 5 Congregational Meeting of Union United Church
BEFORE worship at 9:30. Worship begins at 10:30 a.m. CANCELLED

Those wishing to send your offering to Berniece, here is her address

Union United Church
c/o Berniece Lidster
46810 Martyn Line
Sparta, ON N0L 2H0

If you prefer to donate your offering electronically, there is a "donate now" button on our website at:
www.unionunitedchurch.ca

Just complete the form and submit. You may choose "now" or "monthly".