



Pioneer Pastoral Charge
Sunday March 29, 2020
Lent 5 – Life Giving Breath.
Rev. Helen Reed, Diaconal Minister

Welcome & Announcements
Candle Lighting

We light the Christ Candle, aware of God around, among, & within us. In a moment of silence, we prepare ourselves to celebrate God's presence in our community.

The Season of Lent...

is a time when we are called to search our selves...

God asks questions of us.

We ask questions of God.

Are we listening for God's answer?

Are we willing to hear

when God wants us to make different choices?

Are we ready to be God's voice and action in the world?

Can we live as though faith is more important than fear?

Lent is a journey of letting go, of learning, of growing.

It is not meant to be comfortable

Acknowledging the History of the Land we share.^{1,2}

The land we share is God's land.

We worship God on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot, Niitsitapi, Metis, Cree and Sioux Indigenous people.

We are partners together in the agreements of Treaty Six and Treaty Seven.

As God's people, followers of the way of Jesus, let us be people of Love, of Truth, and of Reconciliation.

✠ Gathering Song: ♪ MV#14 When Two Or Three are gathered.

Call to Worship

As neighbours, friends and partners in faith,
we are travelling the Lenten pathway
in a time of great mystery and challenge.

**May we gather courage
to practise our faith:**

Living Christ's call

To love God with all that we are,

To love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

Prayer of Approach

Loving God,

As we move along our Lenten journey,
remind us that, as faithful people,
we can trust that you will guide
our living and decisions.

There are times when we

yearn for your presence,

but we don't always know

how to recognize when you are with us.

We come to this place

to ask, to listen, to learn.

In this time of worship,

May we feel your spirit push us forward,

May we feel our hearts fill with your love

May your spirit fulfill our yearning

in our prayers, in our worship.

Amen.

Scripture Reading(s):

Scripture is our song for the journey, the living word passed
on from generation to generation to guide and inspire.

**God calls us to be doers of the word
and not hearers only.**

Ezekiel 37:1-14

This story may be one of the best known in Ezekiel's prophecies. God's promise of a new heart and a new spirit echoes Jeremiah's new covenant prophecy (Jeremiah 31:31-34). What God's people need more than anything is for God to do a work of grace within them.

Like other prophets of his day, Ezekiel was convinced that heaven must intervene in order to fix what was wrong on earth. It was not enough for people to try harder and do better.

Ezekiel said that this work of grace begins with God cleansing the people with fresh water. Idolatry and various sins made them impure and unclean, so before they could be restored, they must be made pure by the washing of water. Then, once God gave them a new heart, the people would become willing covenant partners; they would give up on their rebellious, hurtful ways and embrace God's designs for their lives. With a new spirit—which seems to be nothing other than God's Spirit living in and among them—they would have the desire and ability to live out God's reasonable demands on them.

God insisted that all God intended to do to save and redeem was to restore God's good name. God's covenant people have given God a bad reputation among the nations, so God had to act so that they could restore God's reputation.

God is not only the Creator of life, but also the Restorer of life.

Ezekiel 37:1-14 The Voice

Ezekiel :1-2

The Eternal had a hold on me, and I couldn't escape it. The divine wind of the Eternal One picked me up and set me down in the middle of the valley, but this time it was full of

bones. God led me through the bones. There were piles of bones everywhere in the valley—dry bones left unburied.

Eternal One: 3

Son of man, do you think these bones can live?

Ezekiel:

Eternal Lord, certainly You know the answer better than I do.

Eternal One: 4-6

Actually, I do. Prophecy to these bones. Tell them to listen to what the Eternal Lord says to them:

“Dry bones, I will breathe breath into you, and you will come alive. I will attach muscles and tendons to you, cause flesh to grow over them, and cover you with skin. I will breathe breath into you, and you will come alive. After this happens, you will know that I am the Eternal.”

Ezekiel: 7-8

So I did what God told me to do: I prophesied to the bones. As I was speaking, I heard a loud noise—a rattling sound—and all the bones began to come together and form complete skeletons. I watched and saw muscles and tendons attach to the bones, flesh grow over them, and skin wrap itself around the reforming bodies. But there was still no breath in them.

Eternal One: 9

Prophecy to the breath. Speak, son of man, and tell them what the Eternal Lord has to say: “O sweet breath, come from the four winds and breathe into these who have been killed. Make these corpses come alive.”

Ezekiel: 10

So I did what God told me to do: I prophesied to the breath. As I was speaking, breath invaded the lifeless. The bodies

came alive and stood on their feet. I realized then I was looking at a great army.

Eternal One: 11

Son of man, these bones are the entire community of Israel. They keep saying, "Our bones are dry now, picked clean by scavengers. All hope is gone. Our nation is lost."

Ezekiel 12-13

He told me to prophesy and tell them what He said.

Eternal One: 14-15

Pay attention, My people! I am going to open your graves and bring you back to life! I will carry you straight back to the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Eternal One. I will breathe My Spirit into you, and you will be alive once again. I will place you back in your own land. After that you will know I, the Eternal, have done what I said I would do.

Ezekiel: So said the Eternal One.

Prayer for Grace

*During the season of Lent, we are asked,
through story and conversation
to explore what living in faith means for us.
We are asked to consider our commitment to God.
We are to think about the attitudes, decisions
and words we use.
What would God have us choose?*

Faithful and Patient God,

In this Lenten time of contemplation
and faith-filled searching for your truth,

**We recognize that we need
to take time to really listen for you.**

We say that we love you

and follow the example that Jesus gave us...but...

we get caught up in our moments of challenge,

**we forget to stop and feel
your presence beside us.**

We let fear replace our faith.

We make decisions based on our own needs

We ask the question

“Why is this happening to me, God?”

Instead of admitting

“I need your strength to do this”

Shake us up, God,

Make us uncomfortable.

**Remind us again that you stand with us
offering courage, strength and wisdom**

Remind us again

**that the world does not revolve around us
it revolves around you.**

**May your words and wisdom soak into our soul,
loving us, leading us,**

Be with us as we learn to journey together with you.

Amen

Words of Assurance

In all of our stories of God,
we hear God’s voice with us.

Every day God gives us
boundaries to hold us together
and sign posts to move us forward.

Every day, God is with us, waiting for us, loving us.

God said: I will be their God, and they will be my people.

God is. We are.

God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Message/Reflections... Life giving breath.

This Old Testament picture of God breathing life into something that was scattered and life-less is an amazing miracle.

People had not been receptive to the life giving, life guiding word of God and had become so dry, so disconnected that they fell apart. The breath of God, the connection to God was what brought them back to life.

In the scripture introduction, we heard that Ezekiel observed that it would take more than a few people offering their best to turn the world around. It would take the power of God. We also heard that God acted because the actions and words of the people were ruining God's reputation and that this had to be stopped.

I read this scripture and thought about how it speaks to the world today. Our world appears to be falling apart around us, we feel as though we are disconnected within ourselves and from our communities. We are being asked to live in different ways than we ever have before. There are times when we feel as though our bones are falling apart and we don't know how to pull them together again.

From the words and story of a prophet of old, who hadn't yet met Jesus but who knew God we find an answer: Listen for God. Stop running scared. Stop thinking that we have the solution by ourselves. It is not enough for one person to do their best. We must do it together.

Currently, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, our Alberta Health Officer, holds the role of a prophet in our world. She is able, with a team of knowledgeable people to see how we can work together to keep ourselves well, living, connected. She is telling us that what is important at the moment is to make every daily decision with our family and neighbour in mind.

We cannot be running off alone... because doing that may collapse a whole society, a whole group of people.

The first breath of God into our lives is that of love. We are offered love. We are asked to share love. We are asked like Ezekiel, to stand to the side of the broken and disconnected and prophecy to the power of loving and living together. As people of the church, with God's reputation in our hands, we are asked to pause and think how we will do this.

The first thing Ezekiel did was to remind people that God was with them and that if they were open to the spirit of God guiding their living that connections would happen again. When they felt the love of God, they would no longer be disconnected, they would not be alone. Ezekiel went out and shouted to the bones who weren't sure that they wanted to hear that God was with them. When he persisted, when they heard, they began to come together.

Our churches and communities have felt disconnected, but as we have heard and reacted to sharing love in our communities, we have begun to come together. We have phone trees with folk calling others. In the calls shared both callers and recipients are finding joy and sharing that is bringing us back together. Our local towns are exploring how to ensure that every person is shown that they are cared for. Our local businesses are finding ways to offer support in very different ways. The Spirit of Love is moving through us again.

In the Ezekiel story, even as love and life was offered to them, the people whined and said "but it's not the same, we need it fixed now, we can't do anything to help" And God said: "Smarten up! I will bring you out of the misery into something better. It won't be what you are used to, but I will be with you and I will give what you need to live well again"

In our current story, many of us are whining too. Life is not the same as it was. We think that what we can do won't make a difference.

Hear God's voice saying to us "Smarten up!"
We can remember that "Loving our Neighbour"
commandment given to people thousands of years after
Ezekiel, and we know that we can do something.

We can stop for God. Light a candle. Say a prayer. Offer your frustrations to God. Listen for God's words of love, hope and action. Feel that Spirit move you to be God in the world in different and wonderful ways.

We can stay home. We can call people on the phone – just for a chat. Many of us are able to figure out the intricacies of online video chats... and then we can see faces – more than one at a time! – along with the voices. We can help our wobbly bones stand together. We can ask who needs help and then call on others to make it happen.

God connects us through many generations of story, many generations of love. We know this. As people who say we love God and follow Jesus, we know what we are to do. What are our words and actions doing to God's reputation in the world?

Let us open our spirit to God so that we can gather our bones together. Let us remember that God has the wisdom to knit us together in ways that will move us forward into new living together, connected by love for God and love for each other.

✠: ♪ ***VU#83 Let My Spirit Always Sing***

Offering Invitation¹

On the journey that we are on today,
We are reminded that to be
the full family of God in the world,
each piece needs to play its part.
As the bones comes together,
it is the breath of God that enlivens them.
How is the breath of God breathing into you today?
What is the part you can play in bringing us to life?
Please remember to continue to share your
hands and hearts to enable the church
to love our neighbours with us and for us.

Prayers of God's people for God's creation.

God of all generations:
Past, Present and Future.
We gather today to remember
our connections to you and to all of your people.
In the name of the One who showed us how,
and as we live through troubling times,
filled with many questions and few answers,

We pray for the earth
and that all people will
remember our responsibility to look after it,
to care for it, to be aware of our impact on it.

We belong to one another.

We pray for leaders
entrusted with the responsibility
of making decisions to care for your world.
May leaders in our churches,
in our communities, in our country,
throughout your world
feel your presence reminding them
that all people and places are precious.

Give them courage to care,
to cooperate for the sake of others.

We belong to one another.

As illness changes the face of the earth,
we pray for the vulnerable:
the youngest and oldest, the sick,
the lost and alone, those who are mourning,
those who need help to live in a world
that is in turmoil and full of unknowns.
victims of violence, of discrimination.

We belong to one another.

As many put their lives on hold and at risk
for the sake of others,
we pray for the helpers:
those who put their own lives on hold
to teach, to heal, to speak out for justice,
to listen, to learn.

We belong to one another

We pray for ourselves.
May our minds be open to your presence surrounding us,
May we find the courage to work together
so that life may be given and cherished.
May our yearning for you reveal to us
who we are, who we are becoming,
and how we may love and be loved.

We belong to one another. Amen.

✠Blessing & Sending Forth

Filled with the breath, the love, the spirit of God,
Let us go to seek justice for others
to love kindness more than ever,
Let us look for opportunities to work together
as God's community, God's people,
giving strength to the weak,
and sharing love to the world.

May we see, hear and care for all of God's people.
May our yearning hearts feel
God's loving presence with us always.

Changing the Christ Candle:

The light of Christ, shining into all the corners of the earth, showing us
where we are and where we are meant to be.

The Spirit of God. Breathe it in...and know that God is with us wherever
we go.

***✠ Sending Song: ♪ VU#382 Breathe on Me Breath of
God***

Postlude

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Acknowledgements

¹*Called to be the Church. Congregational Giving Program 2020. United Church
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²*CalgaryFoundation.org*

³*Gathering L/E 2020 (Year A)*

⁴*Seasons of the Spirit. Season Fusion Lent.Easter 2020*

