

SOUTHWOOD UNITED CHURCH DEVOTIONAL SERIES

LENT 2026 – YEAR A – WEEK 5

Commitment, trust, waiting, Lazarus raised

Sunday, March 22

Reading: Ezekiel 37:1–2, 11 The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones...bones that were very dry....Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.

Thought: I know I have mentioned before how I experience much of the Bible visually, and this is certainly one of those times. This passage brings a vision of a long stony valley strewn with bones. I can almost hear the wind wailing down the valley and feel the dryness in the air, seeming to suck the life right out of me. It brings with it a feeling of desolation. I think we have all had times in which you feel like your very life has been stripped away, leaving nothing but dust and despair. Have you ever felt dried to the bone? What were the circumstances?

Prayer: Loving God – there are times when I feel all alone, desolate, and empty. Help me to reach out to you, feel you, and know those times will pass.

Monday, March 23

Reading: Ezekiel 37:14 I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live

Thought: I think sometimes we assume the words of the prophets are all doom and gloom – just like yesterday’s reading of the dry bones. So today I find comfort in this later verse in the book of the prophet Ezekiel, for it contains a promise. Yes, there are times when we feel dried up, wrung out and alone. But....God has told us – he will put his own spirit in us, and we will live, we will be transformed and our despair will not just turn to hope, but to joy and abundant living. Can you – will you, feel the Spirit of God within you, even in your dark days?

Prayer: Holy Spirit – help me to feel your presence, especially when I am feeling miserable and downhearted. I want to live with you in my heart and to feel your presence always.

Tuesday, March 24

Reading: Psalm 130:5 I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.

Thought: In this time of Lent I contemplate many things, including the things I am waiting for, including my “transformation” to be more like Jesus. I am definitely a work in progress, and am also sure I have admitted before that patience and self-control are not my gifts. So, in this time of Lent I am seeking to be more mindful and in this way to develop that self control that seems to slip when I am impatient. I know to the bottom of my soul that God can do anything, and that I really can put my hope in God’s word. Yes, I wait – and hope for a gift of patience. What are you contemplating this season of Lent? Are you waiting for something?

Prayer: God – you can do anything. Help me to overcome my weaknesses.

Wednesday, March 25

Reading: Romans 8:6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

Thought: When I began to think about this reading, I was reminded of Colossians 3:2 which says, “set your minds on things above and not on earthly things”. I do try my best to listen to God, and I believe that when I hear the same thing from different sources, God is telling me to pay attention. Interestingly enough, I recently heard a woman in my online group say – seek the things that bring you peace and joy. This fits so well with the reading for today! It can be so easy to fall into the trap of letting your mind be “governed by the flesh,” that is to say, be overly influenced by the world rather than focus on where God wants your mind to be. So today, I am committed to seeking the will of God and all that brings peace and joy and life. What are you seeking today?

Prayer: Jesus – you are the way and the truth and the life. Guide my mind away from the demands and temptations of the earth and help me to set my mind on you, your example, your way and the abundant life you have promised.

Thursday, March 26

Reading: Romans 8:7-9 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you.

Thought: For whatever reason, I was drawn to this concept of “the mind governed by flesh” being “hostile” to God. Being hostile infers being antagonistic and aggressively against something, not just unreceptive or unresponsive. I think (or maybe I want to believe or maybe I am in denial) that I would never be hostile or antagonistic to God, and yet – maybe I am. This is a hard truth to contemplate, and I find comfort in the last part of the verse. For whatever reason I find myself needing to say aloud “I accept the presence of God within me. I live in the world, yet I am not of the world. I live in God’s world.” Have you ever felt that you were in the “realm of the flesh” rather in the realm of the Spirit?

Prayer: Holy Spirit – I welcome you into my life – my heart, my soul, my mind. Stay with me always.

Friday, March 27

Reading: John 11:38-40 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. “Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.” Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

Thought: This is part of the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead. Here, Jesus tells us to believe in miracles. Jesus reminds us that we can see the glory of God. And...I think Jesus is giving us a hint of what will happen to him as well. It seems to me that Lazarus being raised from the dead is a foreshadowing of Jesus’ own resurrection. Certainly the resurrection was a miracle, something we believe in and something that

shows us the power and glory of God. Do you think Jesus was preparing the people for his resurrection?

Prayer: Jesus – I believe in your resurrection, and I recognize it shouts of the glory of God. Thanks be to God!

Saturday, March 28

Reading: John 11:41-42 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

Thought: How wonderful to be brought into the mind of Jesus. The gospels rarely include the kind of detail that we find here, detail that tells us more of how and why Jesus did what he did, not just where and when. Again I marvel at this man. In Jesus there is no doubt, there is no ego. All that Jesus says and does is from God and for the benefit of the people around him. Do you believe Jesus was sent by God for us today, just as he told those people of long ago?

Prayer: Jesus – I want to thank you for being who you were as well as who you are. Thank you for your thoughts and your love for me.

Complete Lectionary Readings for the Fifth Sunday in Lent March 22

Ezekiel 37:1–14 **The Valley of Dry Bones**

The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. ³ He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I said, “Sovereign LORD, you alone know.”

⁴ Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! ⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath^[a] enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’”

⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸ I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

⁹ Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

¹¹ Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’” ¹² Therefore prophecy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴ I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD

Psalm 130 **Psalm 130**

A song of ascents.

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD;

² Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive

to my cry for mercy.

³ If you, LORD, kept a record of sins,

Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But with you there is forgiveness,

so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

⁵ I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,

and in his word I put my hope.

⁶ I wait for the Lord

more than watchmen wait for the morning,

more than watchmen wait for the morning.

⁷ Israel, put your hope in the LORD,

for with the LORD is unfailing love

and with him is full redemption.
⁸ He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins

Romans 8:6–11 Romans 8:6-11
New International Version

⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life^[a] because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of^[b] his Spirit who lives in you

John 11:1–45 John 11:1-45
New International Version

The Death of Lazarus

11 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."
⁴ When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷ and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."
⁸ "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?"
⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. ¹⁰ It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."
¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."
¹² His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." ¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.
¹⁴ So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."
¹⁶ Then Thomas (also known as Didymus^[a]) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Jesus Comforts the Sisters of Lazarus

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles^[b] from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹ “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴ Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

²⁸ After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

³⁶ Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

The Plot to Kill Jesus

⁴⁵ Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in hi