

**Deacon Norah Fisher's Sermon**  
**Psalm 130 – March 22, 2026**

Grace, peace, and mercy are yours from the Triune God. Amen.

As we all learned from the Sean Penn/Susan Sarandon movie a few years back, "Dead Man Walking" is the phrase uttered by guards and inmates as a death-row inmate takes his final walk down the prison hallway to the execution chamber.

Moving under the black weight of the imminent fulfillment of society's death sentence, the convict literally is a dead man walking.

As gruesome as that image is, an equally grim reality comes from the testimony of our Scripture readings this morning.

Every day there are millions of men and women who spiritually qualify as dead men walking and dead women walking.

Are you looking just to get through each day at work until you can get out the door?

Are you longing for the weekend by Monday afternoon?

Do you count it a good day when no one asks anything of you or makes any demands upon your time?

Have you stopped risking meeting new people,  
going new places,  
taking new roads,  
reading new books,  
listening to new music?

Are you afraid to attempt love because you might be disappointed or rejected or your safe mundane existence upset?

Have you shut down your spirit in order to safeguard your (false) sense of security?

You can be a dead man/dead woman walking and yet no one sees it – no one knows it except you.

The speaker in today's Psalm cries out to the Lord because he's finally realized he's without hope,  
without help,  
without a way of escape from his Sheol, his depth of despair.

He's been a dead man walking, and that realization has now brought him to his knees before the Lord. But even in this pit of despair this psalmist clings to a faith in a listening and living God – a God who hears his cries and is moved to action.

By the time Psalm 130 closes, the psalmist has not only risen up out of his personal abyss – his soul's hellhole – but his spirit has become sparkling under the promise of divine forgiveness.

After beautifully and movingly expressing both his despair and belief that God is a God of forgiveness, love, and redemption, the psalmist joyfully invites all of Israel to share in his faith.

If God will forgive his own long litany of sins, the psalmist reasons, then surely the Lord will do the same for all of Israel, for all of God's people.

It's hard for those of us living on the other side of the First Testament to appreciate what a tremendous leap of faith this psalmist makes.

He bounds from the bottom of a self-created pit of despair to the heights of an entire world redeemed, renewed, forgiven, and loved.

This psalmist is not about to be satisfied with a deliverance that merely shines some paltry pinpoint of light down upon the depths of his own spiritual blackness.

He expects nothing less than for his life and the existence of all Israel to be wholly transformed and enlightened, by the power of a forgiving, redeeming God.

The psalmist is the poetic embodiment of the other Hebrew Bible text read today, Ezekiel 37:1-14. Like the dry bones laid out before Ezekiel, the psalmist was dried up and dead.

Under God's directive, Ezekiel commands the dry bones to rise and put on blood, flesh, sinew and skin.

Yet even in this new condition, the bones are not yet alive. They are without breath, without oxygen, without that spirit that brings genuine life, abundant living, fulfilled existence to flesh and blood.

Not until God instructs Ezekiel on how to infuse the breath of life and the oxygen of the spirit into these bones are they at last brought to life (Ezekiel 37:9).

Like these dried, dead bones, the despondent and despairing psalmist is dead to the fullness of life until the spirit of the forgiving, redeeming, living God moves into him, and animates him with new life, new hope, and new expectations for himself and for his people.

His transformation is just as dramatic as that of the valley full of bones.

It's this new breath filling his lungs and life that makes the psalmist so suddenly joyful, optimistic, expectant, and exuberant.

Forget what I said earlier about the psalmist taking a leap of faith out of his depths.

The psalmist is blown out of his pit of despair by the all-powerful oxygen burst of God's gusting spirit.

Bishop Kenneth Ulmer (Inglewood, California) envisions the animating, life-fulfilling power of the Holy Spirit as like the transformation that comes over the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade balloon figures as they're inflated.

Without any air these huge balloons lay flat on the floor, limp, and featureless figures.

But when the wind starts whipping up inside those balloons, they begin to rise, stand up, and stand tall.

They become individuals, people and creatures that we recognize and love.

Once on the parade route, these balloons take on even more life, for they're animated not just by the air within them, but by the winds that buffet and bolster them down the street.

As experienced by Ezekiel and the psalmist, once again the animating spirit of God moves with power and precision, and brought, for example, Lazurus, a dead man walking right out of his tomb!

This is what God settles for.

Miracle, rebirth, deliverance from the pit, and eternal redemption.

God doesn't define winning as not losing.

God doesn't settle for anything less than joy unbounded, and glory filled dreams fulfilled.

Are you feeling flattened, limp, featureless, weighted down by despair, disappointments, and defeats?  
The wind is waiting.

The oxygen is obtainable.

It is early spring when weather is blustery and unpredictable, when big blows and great gusts can come seemingly out of nowhere and transform a late-winter day.

Will you let the Holy Spirit move with power and precision into your soul,

across your life,

across this church,

blowing its fresh and transforming breath across our tired soul's existence?

Or will you continue on, as dead men and women walking?

Amen