

I speak to you in the name of our Creator, Christ the light of the world and the Holy Spirit, the one who heals, restores, and transforms us. Amen.

As we gather here on this fifth Sunday of Lent we get to do something unexpected. Sounds like the Holy Spirit to me! In our tradition we don't normally baptise during Lent. We use this time for preparation, and we baptise on Easter morning when we celebrate new life in Christ. But it was super important for Oliver's grandmother Millie to be here, so we chose this Sunday. Only after did I look at the readings and surprise, surprise, we hear about bones being brought back to life and Lazarus raised from his tomb! Sounds like the Holy Spirit to me!

Oliver informed his dad last October 19th when we baptised Mozhy, Shahram, Loretta, and Oliver's friend Brooks, that he too wanted to be baptised, but he wanted to be immersed like his dad was. Joel and I didn't think a baptism in the ocean or lake in March would be a smart idea so we started to brainstorm what we could do **in** the church. We settled on a horse trough, which seems to me to be a quintessentially Metchosin thing to do. Many thanks to Dawne for sourcing this for us!

And the readings today certainly capture our imaginations, don't they? Can you imagine a valley full of bones coming to life? Bones being knit together with sinews and flesh wrapping it all together. It's a rather disturbing image! Ezekiel is a prophet of Israel after they have been taken into exile in Babylon. Things are dark for the children of Abraham. They and their prophets are in despair. They are wondering where their God is and if there is any redemption for them. We hear this in the psalm today. One characteristic of Hebrew writing is the use of repetition.

My soul waits for the Lord,
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.

We can hear the despair in the repetition. The lament is very powerful. Israel in exile has lost their hope, their bones are dried up, and they are completely cut off. God gives Ezekiel a vision of a valley of dry bones which knit together into a vast multitude of people. The Spirit breathes life into them. With this dramatic vision fresh in Ezekiel's mind, God promises him that "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. ¹³ And you shall **know** that I am the Lord when I open **your graves** and bring you up from **your** graves, O my people. ¹⁴ 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." Did you hear the two repetitions here? Their graves will be opened, they will be brought out of their graves, and they will be returned to the land of Israel. The note of despair in the repetition in the psalm is answered by the repetition of new life and return in Ezekiel 37. New life planted in their home soil.

Our Gospel reading tells us of another story of the dead brought back to life. This time it's only one person, but it isn't a metaphor this time. At least not for Lazarus and his sisters! There is a repetition in this story too. In their grief, both Martha and Mary **independently** say to Jesus "Lord, **if** you had been here, my brother would not have died." Sometimes when I read that I hear a bit of a rebuke from the sisters, other times I hear the cry of despair, the question, "why were you not here, why has this happened"? That question is echoed by some of the crowd; "if he could heal a blind man, surely he could have healed Lazarus, if only he had

arrived in time!” When Jesus weeps, the witnesses exclaim “See how he loved him!” But I think his love is also for Martha and Mary. Their grief moves Jesus deeply. I’m sure you have experienced a time when another’s weeping brought tears to your own eyes. This image of a very human Jesus comforts us. We hope he weeps for us too!

When Jesus asks the stone to be taken away, Martha warns him that there will be a **stench**. Lazarus has been dead **four** days! The body will have begun to decompose. These are not the **sterile** dry bones in Ezekiel. But Jesus pays no mind, he simply calls Lazarus out of his tomb and commands them to “**Unbind** him, and let him go.” ... “Unbind him, and let him go.”

The Bible is full of some amazing stories of resurrection. But God is still resurrecting today. The Creator breaks us out of our stenchy tombs of fear, despair, and woundedness, and breathes new life into his people. The Holy One who creates life, breaks through the barriers of death, and **recreates** life. He unbinds us and sets us free.

My primary family story is one of resurrection. Over 56 years ago, the Holy Spirit breathed new life into my father bringing him out of the living death of alcoholism. A life and family trapped in the tomb of addiction were brought into the light. Where there was once darkness, despair, suicide attempts, and deeply dysfunctional and harmful behaviours, there was now light and life abundant. God resurrected my father and in so doing created an incredible cascade of grace which has rippled out to countless people.

Over the course of my life, I have heard many stories of lives being resurrected; of people being pulled from their tombs and broken free from what has

been binding them. But I've learned something the hard way, it seems that the Spirit breaking you out of one tomb does not protect you from creating another! Sometimes it's so easy to compartmentalize pain, we don't even realize we are doing it. It's a survival instinct. In order to carry on with our lives, we **entomb our wounds**. We cover them up and try not to think about them. You know the ones I mean, like when you were bullied in school or even at work last week. Or when you were judged and criticised for not being the right kind of Christian, for not having enough faith or the wrong kind of faith. Maybe it was the time a friend betrayed you, or you suffered the loss of a loved one. It could be the time you were rejected, whether it was for a job you really wanted, or by someone you loved. Maybe it was sexual, emotional, or physical abuse. These wounds are so deep and painful, they can undo us, so we **entomb** them. We lock them away so we can function. But here's the thing: each one of those tombs holds a part of ourselves. We are not whole; and that fragmented self, no matter how highly functioning, is not fully alive. We develop coping mechanisms to protect those tombs and in so doing harm our relationships with others. Fear of rejection causes us to close ourselves off and not let others in. In order to avoid rejection, we reject others. It's a terrible cycle. But God, who weeps for us, wants to break us out of our tombs. God wants to make us whole and fully alive.

There is an old phrase often used in the Black Church: It's Friday, but Sunday's a coming. It holds that tension. It refuses to deny the reality of suffering, but it also refuses to let suffering have the final word. It's Friday—but Sunday's a coming. And that is exactly where we stand today. Because what happens in baptism is not separate from that story—it is woven directly into it. Baptism is not just a gentle ritual. It is not simply a welcoming ceremony or a symbolic washing.

Baptism is a dying. And a rising. When I ask Oliver what baptism meant for him, he said these very words, “death and rebirth.”

As we reflected before, when we go down into the water, it is like being buried with Christ. And when we rise out of the water, it is like being raised with him into a new life. That might sound like strong language—especially when we are baptizing a seven-year-old child. But these were Oliver’s words and the Church has always insisted on this truth: baptism is nothing less than participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. Not someday. Now. And today, we will see that enacted in the most physical, embodied way possible. Oliver has grasped this mystery. He is looking forward to going down into the water and coming up again. In that moment, something deep and mysterious **is** proclaimed: that death does not get the last word over his life. He belongs to God. And the Spirit of God will dwell in him. That Spirit—the same Spirit we heard about in our readings today—is the breath of life itself. The Spirit who dwells within us and gives life to our mortal bodies. The Spirit who does not avoid our broken places but enters them, gently, persistently, bringing healing. It’s Friday, but Sunday’s a coming!

What areas of your life need resurrection? What tombs can the Holy One break you out of? Where do you need rebirth? Are you ready to be brought out into abundant life? As Oliver makes his baptismal vows, join with him and reaffirm yours. Let the Holy Spirit breathe deep into your soul and set you free from whatever is binding you.

My friends, it may be Friday, but Sunday’s a coming!