

(Read the prayers and scripture readings and recite the Creed aloud, even if you are by yourself, in order to hear with the ears each one)

Prepare for worship: Sit in silence or with soft music for a few moments

Opening Prayer:

God of promise and hope, we come to you feeling dried up, like a valley filled with dry bones. Share your visions of new life with us, that we may have hope for our future. Bring us up from the grave, that we might live as people of promise. Put your Spirit within us, that we might have life everlasting. Amen

Hymn            *Sweet, Sweet Spirit*

There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place,  
and I know that it's the Spirit of the Lord;  
there are sweet expressions on each face,  
and I know they feel the presence of the Lord.

Sweet Holy Spirit, sweet heavenly Dove,  
stay right here with us, filling us with your love;  
and for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise;  
without a doubt we know that we have been revived  
when we shall leave this place.

Affirmation of Faith    Apostle's Creed

Prayer:

Eternal God, you raised from the dead our Lord Jesus and by your Holy Spirit brought life to your church. Breathe upon us again with your Spirit and give new life to your people, through the same Jesus Christ our redeemer, who taught us to pray.

The Lord's Prayer

Prayer of Illumination:

Open our ears that we may hear and our hearts and minds  
that we may receive your word O Lord our rock and redeemer.

(After each reading take two to three minutes to reflect upon the meaning of the passage to you today.)

Old Testament Reading      Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 130

New Testament Reading      Romans 8:6-11

Gospel Reading                John 11: 1-46

Sermon                         There Is Hope

Song                         *God Be With You till We Meet Again*

God be with you till we meet again;  
by his counsels guide, uphold you,  
with his sheep securely fold you;  
God be with you till we meet again.

Benediction:

Even in this time of uncertainty, we have hope for we have faith that God, our loving creator will give us new life. Amen

Ezekiel 37:1-14 & John 11:1-45

Our Passages from Ezekiel and John seem to present situations in which there is no hope.

Ezekiel was among the first wave of deportees from Judea after the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 596 BCE. His call to prophesy came while in exile and he prophesied to the exiles. In the passage we read today the LORD has placed him in a valley of dry bones. This gives the image of a defeated army after a battle where the victors carried off its casualties but left the bodies of the defeated army in the field to rot. A valley full of the dried dead bones of a defeated army, a defeated Judea, that lost the battle. Defeated and left to rot, leaving nothing but dry bones. No hope for this defeated Army.

Then as we look to our Gospel lesson, we read that Jesus' friend Lazarus was sick, then died before Jesus could get there. Martha, the sister, emphasizes this; he's been dead four days and there is already a stench. Lazarus is D. E. A. D. Dead. He's not asleep. He is not in a coma. He is dead and there is a stench to prove it. Lazarus is dead and there is no hope.

It could easily feel like there is no hope as we deal with this pandemic, this new virus that we know so little about. We may feel hopeless because even as the medical impact is contained, we don't know what the economic impact will be. We feel an increased sense of anxiety and fear permeating the land.

I fear for our brothers and sisters in third world countries as this virus spreads. I heard an interview with a doctor from Honduras who stated that there were, I believe, 19 respirators in the whole country. Doctors and Nurses would have to deal with this disease without personal protection equipment. They would then become spreaders of the disease instead of halting the disease.

While it is easy just to focus on how this disease is affecting us here in the US, we must remember that this is a world wide situation. If we do manage to control it here, but do nothing to help stop the spread in other countries, then there will be the possibility of a second or third outbreak as the world is much more mobile.

The situation with this virus may very well seem hopeless, but let us continue to look at these passages from Ezekiel and John.

The LORD tells Ezekiel to prophesy to those dry bones. Now prophesying is not about telling the future, but about telling the word of the LORD. Proclaiming the message that God has to the people. So, Ezekiel delivered the message that God gave to him to these dry bones. As he gave the message there was suddenly a rattling and clicking and the dry bones came together. Sinew, flesh and skin formed on these dry bones and they retook their human form. God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath, the Spirit and the Breath of God blew through that valley and into them and they came to life.

These bones represented a defeated and humiliated Israel and Judah, nations that had been crushed by oppressive empires. Their city and temple destroyed. Its king and leaders deported. Now God is saying through Ezekiel that Israel will be restored. God will rebuild Israel and God will put his breath into the land. The nation and the people will be restored and the people will know that it was God that restored them.

The story from the Gospel carries this message of restoration even further. Though Lazarus is dead, Jesus goes to the tomb and calls for Lazarus to Come Out! Jesus calls the dead man to come out, and he does. Lazarus who was dead four days, stinky smelly dead, came out of the tomb still wrapped in the death clothes.

Jesus gives the instruction to unbind him, take off the death clothes and let him go. Jesus shows through this precursor of his death and resurrection that through him the bonds of death are overcome. Jesus breaks the bonds of death and gives eternal life.

Restoration and resurrection are God's promises to us in these stories. God restores us to life, not an old life that will end in death but a new life that is eternal.

The message for us in our present situation is that life will be restored. We do not know how long our lives will continue to be disrupted by this virus. We do not know what the long ranging, world-wide effects will be. We do not know how this will affect the global economy. We do not know how many will lose their lives to

this virus. We, who have faith in God, do know that God will restore our lives and the divine creation. There is hope.

The message is also one of resurrection. Through the hardships, pain and death caused by this disease, God will give new life, eternal life. This is the new life that we receive now as we have faith, that is complete trust and obedience in God, that carries us through our physical death to life with God.

This is our hope. Life will be restored. It may not be life as we knew it before this virus. It will not be life as we know it now as we experience this situation. It will be a better life.

Restoration and resurrection in the midst of this situation. This is our hope.

We will gather again in this sanctuary to worship God instead of Online, though we will continue to post our services online for those who are unable to come. When will this be? I cannot tell, for I would rather err on the side of caution to keep you and our community safe. I know there are some churches that continue to worship together claiming that God will protect them. My friends, God will protect us as we follow the recommendations of the Medical professionals and researchers who are studying and fighting this disease.

Therefore, we will continue to worship together in Spirit though we cannot physically. But we worship and live with hope knowing that God will restore and give new life now and in the resurrection.