

Lent 5 Year A 2020
March 29, 2020
Sermon

Readings: Ezekiel 37:1-14, Psalm 130, Romans 8:6-11, John 11:1-45

If you do not have a Bible handy, I recommend using this website: <http://bible.oremus.org/>

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the words of our psalmist, “Out of the depths, O Lord, we cry to you. Lord, hear our voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of our supplication!” Let your ears, O God, be attentive to those who are sick and dying during this pandemic. Let your ears be attentive to those who are unable to receive the medical care they need. Let your ears be attentive to hospital workers and medical suppliers who are unable to get the devices necessary for their patients. Let your ears be attentive to exhausted and worried caregivers that are reaching their limits. Let your ears be attentive to all those in need of your healing touch.

Let your ears, O God, be attentive to those who are unemployed or laid off, to those whose livelihood has been deeply impacted from COVID-19. Let your ears be attentive to those who are hungry; to those who are unsure of where they will receive their next meal; to those who are dying from lack of food. Let your ear be attentive to grocery workers and food pantry workers who put themselves at risk of infection in order to feed others.

Let your ears, O God, be attentive to lawmakers, public leaders, and those who have to make difficult decisions for their communities. Let your ears be attentive to churches that are unable to assemble as the body of Christ to receive the sacraments that only you can provide. Let your ears be attentive to agencies working to provide relief during a time when all the world experiences deep need.

Let your ears, O God, be attentive to all those in any need, to the uncertain, the anxious, to the lost, the forgotten, the exiled, the immigrant, and all those who have no one to pray for them. Hold all of your beloved people in your tender care.

“Out of the depths, O Lord, we cry to you. ... Let your ears be attentive to the voice of our supplication!”

Let your ears be attentive to Mary and Martha, as they mourn the death of their brother Lazarus. Be attentive to those who believe that if only Jesus had been there, Lazarus would not have died. Let your ears be attentive to Jesus your Son, entering the same city that had just tried to stone him to death; entering the city to perform a sign that will lead to his arrest and crucifixion.

Let your ears, O God, be attentive to the ancient Israelites in exile. To those who suffered torture at the hands of the Babylonians. To those who endured famine, disease, and despair. To those who lost their temple and their city, who lost their loved ones, and who lost their land.

“Out of the depths we cry to you, O LORD; O LORD, hear our voice!”

Especially in times like these, it can feel like God is not listening. It feels like there is so much going wrong in the world and in our lives, that God couldn't possibly be present and paying attention. Sometimes all we can do is cry out to God as our Psalmist does. As we join with the Psalmist in these words, we cry out for God to listen to us and to save us and the whole world in the midst of our suffering.

Like Mary and Martha, we mourn because Jesus is taking too long to reach us. We weep and we cry out to our God because we only see death and despair. We wonder if God's Spirit is

truly in us. What if all we have is death and despair? What if God has left us? What if all we have are dry bones, hopeless Israelites, and a dead brother and friend? We are left with a world of no hope, no love, no life.

But God says: "I am the LORD ... I will put my Spirit within you and you shall live!" In the midst of the death and despair of this world, God breaks in with words of promise: a promise of life through the Holy Spirit. With that life, we receive hope, love and forgiveness. With that life, the Israelites return from exile. With that life, the dry bones animate and sinews, flesh and skin cover them. That life is the breath of God in the dry bones. That life is the breath that Lazarus takes as he walks out of his tomb. With the life that God promises, Mary and Martha wipe away their tears of sadness.

God does not promise that as Christians we can avoid suffering, death and despair. We have no choice but to face death and grief. We suffer with all the world in this pandemic. But, God does promise that especially in the midst of these times of anxiety and hopelessness, Christ *is* with us, and Christ gives us life and hope. Nothing is ever so hopeless or dead that Christ cannot give it life. Even when it seems impossible, God brings life out of death. The bones in the valley were dry and brittle and dead. But God animated the dry bones, and gave them life and breath. Lazarus was so dead that you could smell it, but God in Christ brought him out of the tomb and gave him new life. Christ, God's only beloved Son, will die on the cross, but in his death, God brings life to the world. It seems impossible, but God brings life out of death, hope out of despair, and love out of hatred. This means that we find Christ with us especially at the worst of times, because that is where God is working to bring comfort and peace.

And when we see God in times like these, in the midst of death and despair, we receive hope. God is able to provide hope, even when it seems impossible. We receive hope for the resurrection, but we also receive hope for today. Romans tells us that we have the Spirit *in us*, and that Spirit is life. Even in this midst of this pandemic, we can find glimmers of hope. We see the new life of spring popping up all around us, signs of God's new creation coming to life. We see new life as people reach out to one another, reconnecting with friends and family, and caring for their neighbor in need. We see new life as people who have abundance share their resources with food pantries and agencies that are able to provide relief. We see new life as churches seek new ways to reach out to their congregations, creating community through technology. We see new life as manufacturers shift their focus to create additional medical supplies and devices to meet the growing need. God provides new life for us, even in the midst of our world right now, and God is working to provide us with hope, comfort and peace.

There is reason to hope. There is hope because God hears us as we cry from the depths of our despair. There is hope because God loves us. There is hope because God breathes Spirit into our flesh and bones. God's Spirit in us means that death and despair are transformed to restoration and hope. God's Spirit in us means new life in Christ.

And so as we continue to navigate this anxious and isolated time, and as we continue our Lenten journey toward the tomb, death and despair seem imminent in our Gospel readings and in the world around us. And we cry out to God, "Out of the depths, I cry to you, O LORD, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication." And God responds to our cries, with the promise that God *is* listening, and that God *is* present with us even in this dark valley. We receive the promise that God provides comfort and peace for all those who fear. God brings forth hope and assurance in the midst of despair and uncertainty. And in the midst of death, God brings forth life for all. Thanks be to God. Amen.