

Service for 5th Lent

Call to worship: [Romans 8:11](#)

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Hymn 364 – O for a thousand tongues

O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of his grace!

He speaks; and listening to his voice,
New life the dead receive;
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice;
The humble poor believe.

Prayers

Our Lord Jesus Christ said: 'The first commandment is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these. I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.' **Amen. Lord, have mercy.**

Lord, you are steadfast in your love and infinite in your mercy;

You welcome sinners and invite them to be your guests.

We confess our sins, trusting in you to forgive us.

(in silence we let God's light bring to light what we need God to transform)

We have yielded to temptation and sinned:

Lord, have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

We have turned from our neighbours in their need:

Christ, have mercy. **Christ have mercy.**

We have resisted your word in our hearts:

Lord, have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and keep us in life eternal. **Amen.**

Most merciful God, who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world: grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross, we may triumph in the power of his victory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

All-age thoughts

Today we read two amazing Bible stories: Ezekiel and the valley of dry bones; and Jesus saying 'I am the resurrection and the life' and raising Lazarus from death to life.

Of all the U-turns in history – there is no bigger U-turn than resurrection.

There was a notice on Tingley 'wayside pulpit' notice-board that said 'With God, LIFE will never be the same again'. When we let God take over our lives, everything changes. We can call this 'conversion' and it is a sort of resurrection.

A great example of 'conversion' or new life is found in the film Monsters Inc. The whole of the monsters' world is powered by the screams of frightened children. The turning-point or 'conversion' experience for Mike and Sully is when they realise that the laughter of children is 10 times more powerful than their screams – and everything changes. Instead of being the scary monster under the bed - they become crazy, funny, friendly monsters, learning how to make children laugh – and they convert their whole community to be powered by joy and laughter instead of fear.

You can find the clip here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWR7Sq7zc-I>

Hymn 397 – The Spirit lives to set us free

The Spirit lives to set us free,
Walk, walk in the light;
He binds us all in unity,
Walk, walk in the light.

Jesus promised life to all
Walk, walk in the light
The dead were wakened by his call
Walk, walk in the light.
Walk in the light (x3) walk in the light of the Lord.

Old Testament Reading: [Ezekiel 37:1-14](#)

Gospel [John 11: 1-45](#)

(read each scripture slowly – read it twice or three times – ask the Holy Spirit to help you hear the Living Word through the written Word. If you are with family, either of these readings can be read 'dramatically' by several voices) Both readings can be found at the end of the service.

Hymn 386 – In the beginning was darkness and nothing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyjd25TyzUw>

Or Hymn 391 – O breath of life, come sweeping through us

Thoughts:

Can these dry bones live?

God asks Ezekiel this question while he is looking at a valley full of dry bones. We ask ourselves a similar question, perhaps many times in many situations: We look at our church and our own Christian lives and we ask 'can these dry bones live?' We look at relationships that seem dead, abusive, dysfunctional and even violent, within families, within communities and between tribes and nations. 'Can these dry bones live?' We perhaps look at our relationship with creation: pollution and exploitation of air, water, earth - climate change – bringing death to God's beauty and intricate inter-relationship. And we ask 'can these dry bones live?'

What bones was Ezekiel looking at?

He was looking at a whole people: his people/community, the people of Israel. The bones can also represent all exiled people, all enslaved people, all exploited people. Today, as we look with despair on the whole of human-kind, as we see the death-toll of corona-virus rise each day, as we are tempted to loose hope - God leads us too into the valley of dry bones.

Can these dry bones live?

You can tell Ezekiel doesn't think so by his answer:
Lord – why are you asking me? Only you know!

Only God can bring hope into a hopeless situation

Perhaps doubtfully at first, Ezekiel obeys God – and speaks God's word to the bones – then calls upon the wind of God's spirit to give them breath and live. And they rise – a mighty army!

1) Hope in a hopeless situation

Martha and Mary were facing a similar hopeless situation. Their beloved brother Lazarus is dead and for some inconceivable reason their friend Jesus didn't turn up on time.

Only God! Only God brings hope.

But Jesus says (verse 25) 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'

Martha says to Jesus: 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

Martha's confession shows that she sees who Jesus really is and he gives her hope in a hopeless situation.

She believes that somehow Jesus can bring life to the dead.

This is a miracle unheard of and unknown up to this point in history.

Resuscitation is one thing – but resurrection is like the healing of the man born blind but about 1million times less likely.

This is hope. This is light that is invincible. This is life that is stronger than death. This is love which is stronger than any hatred and love that overcomes both sin and death. This is new creation. This is what only God can do – and he shows in Jesus life that he will do it. ‘I am the resurrection and the life!’ Not just for the future – but for now – I am life now – new creation now!

If God can do this for a corpse – there is hope for me! For us! For all the hopeless situations of the world.

2) Word and Spirit

New creation – follows the pattern of the first creation – and involves the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

Ezekiel is commanded to prophecy to the bones – and they join together and get flesh, but there is no life until God gets him to call on the 4 winds and God’s breath enters their nostrils. Then they can rise up – a mighty army!

If we are looking on dry bones – we need to remember the same – there is hope! But it is only God who knows, God who wills, God who has the power. We need God’s word – and God’s spirit.

Churches sometimes fall into problems concentrating on getting one without the other. If we are all word/doctrine the church can be powerfully **legalistic** and all about conforming to the ‘marks of orthodoxy’. If the Church is all spirit it can be lively, explosive even, but without a framework, without Christ’s shepherding this may lead to ‘**licence**’ or leisure (we do what feels good when we feel like doing it).

Illustration: think of a sailing boat in a strong wind – the boat needs sails to catch the wind but also a rudder and keel to create stability and point it in the right direction. With sails flapping uncontrollably in the wind the boat without a rudder is at the mercy of the tides and waves. However, if the boat has a heavy keel and strong rudder, it will still go nowhere if the sails are not up to catch the wind.

God’s word and God’s spirit bring life and hope where there was death and despair.

3) Power and participation

The interesting thing is that, yes God can do all things without our aid, but God always wants us to participate. There is power and hope for transformation, for resurrection – but we need to cooperate with God. See how the humans cooperated with God in our two Bible stories:

Ezekiel was:

- ready to be shown the situation – be honest – see – discern
- ready to preach and prophecy – word of God – hope in hopeless situation – trust

- ready for God to come! He obeyed and called on the winds – listened, obeyed

Mary and Martha:

- had to call to Jesus for help
- They spoke honestly to him about the facts of their situation
- They take Jesus and show him the tomb – their place of desolation
- They push away the stone when Jesus commands them too – even though they are doubtful and fearful of the stench of death.
- They unbind Lazarus from his grave-clothes

Conclusion : Can these dry bones live?

Yes – there is hope in hopeless situations – Jesus is the resurrection and the life!

There is God's word and spirit – there is God's power – if we are ready to participate.

Where is God showing us the dry bones? What dead / decaying / stinky stuff have we hidden away? We don't have to keep repeating our mistakes, dull habits, empty words, faithless actions. What do we want to change? There is hope for us to make life-affirming choices. The one who raised Lazarus, and raised an army from dry bones, can surely make my dry bones live!

The power is there – let's participate – listen for God's word – call the 4 winds of the spirit

We are in a time when many are looking at dry bones. Many are despairing and looking for hope. Creation itself is desperate – groaning and longing for us to learn – to see sense – to be 'converted' and to honour and care for what God has made.

We need to convert our power source – like Mike and Sully in Monsters Inc.

All the power of fear and suspicion and self-preservation drives a world that pours its wealth and energy and ingenuity into building walls and borders and guns and bombs.

Now is the time to convert to the power source of God's Spirit and God's Word.

Then all the power of love and compassion and justice will drive a world that pours its wealth and energy and ingenuity into healing the sick, feeding the hungry and tending the earth gently.

*'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.
(Ezekiel 36:26-28)*

May God strengthen our hope as we put our trust in Jesus who is our resurrection and our abundant life. Amen.

(There are many more themes to explore in this weeks gospel reading. Some questions you may ponder: Why did Jesus wait before visiting his friend? Why did Jesus weep? Which character in the story represents your own location on the journey towards new life in Christ? Why were there leaders of the people who failed to celebrate the miracle?)

Song: In God we trust (Hillsong)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uy2EtG3UkL8>

Prayers (from Anglican Communion)

Let us pray to the Lord,
who is our refuge and stronghold.

For the health and well-being of our nation, that all who are fearful and anxious may be at peace and free from worry:

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

For the isolated and housebound,
that we may be alert to their needs,
and care for them in their vulnerability:

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

For our homes and families,
our schools and young people,
and all in any kind of need or distress:

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

For a blessing on our local community,
that our neighbourhoods may be places of trust and friendship,
where all are known and cared for:

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray, to the mercy and protection of God.
Merciful Father,

accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn 347 Crown him with many crowns

Or Hillsong Cornerstone <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QvLxZEU02uI>

Crown him the Lord of life,
Who triumphed o'er the grave,
And rose victorious in the strife
For those he came to save.
His glories now we sing,
Who died, and rose on high;

Who died, eternal life to bring,
And lives, that death may die.

Blessing:

Deep peace of the running wave to you,

Deep peace of the flowing air to you,

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you,

Deep peace of the shining stars to you,

Moon and stars pour their healing light on you. Deep peace of Christ, Christ the light of the world to you,

Deep peace of Christ to you. **Amen.**