



## **Fifth Sunday in Lent - March 26th, 2023**

### **The Fig Tree Worship Resource**

#### **Call to worship & Lighting the Candle**

Out of the depths we cry to you,  
O God of our weary bones.  
**Make haste, come and breathe life into us.**

Out of the wilderness places we cry to you,  
O God of our lost hopes and dreamings.  
**Unbind us and let us go.**

Lead us on, lead us into life, into communion,  
O God of our ancestors and our grandchildren,  
**Make haste, come and breathe life into us.**  
**Unbind us and let us go. Amen.**

*Light the candle - Christ is with us.*

#### **Acknowledging**



*Uniting Aboriginal and Islander  
Christian Congress*

As we gather, we acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and these waters. We pay respect to elders past, present and emerging. As First and Second Peoples walking together, we commit ourselves to be people of the covenant, listening, truth telling and seeking justice for all.

#### **Singing- Come, O God of all the earth TiS 181**

#### **Prayer**



#### **Psalm 130 (responsive)**

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.  
**Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be  
attentive to the voice of my supplications!**

If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,  
Lord, who could stand?  
**But there is forgiveness with you,  
so that you may be revered.**

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;  
**my soul waits for the Lord more than those  
who watch for the morning, more than  
those who watch for the morning.**

O Israel, hope in the LORD!  
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,  
and with him is great power to redeem.  
**It is he who will redeem Israel from all its  
iniquities.**

O God of infinite compassion  
Whose Son is the very embodiment of  
your love here with us.  
With the aid of your Spirit, we adore you.

Lord Jesus, Light and Life of the world,  
we see you as a humble man knowing  
grief at the death of a friend,  
weeping with others.

We see you angry at the presence of the power  
which, before it destroys human life,  
holding us by its inhibiting, intimidating threat.

Yet knowing your own personal confrontation  
with death was imminent,  
you chose to challenge it and called Lazarus  
out from its grasp into new eternal life.  
You call us out from all that holds us back,  
imprisons us and keeps us from faith in you.

By your cross and resurrection you liberate us  
as children of your new age  
where death has no dominion, no power  
to separate us from your saving love:  
we adore you.

Spirit of God, around us, leading us on  
with Christ; and within us  
assuring us of his presence with us  
and power to save us;  
and sharing with us the gift of life eternal:  
we adore you.

**Blessed is God forever. Amen.**

*Written by Rev. Ron Gordon - from Dad & Daughter p24.*

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#### ***Passing the peace***

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May the Peace of God dwell with you:  
**and also with you.**

#### ***Listening***

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Read: John 11: 1-45

As this is a long reading you may choose to give people the voices of certain characters to read their parts as the story unfolds. Invite everyone to find two or three words in the reading that speak to them today. Share these words with each other.

Read: Ezekiel 37: 1 – 14

For these words of faith and for Jesus the Word:  
**Thanks be to God.**

#### ***Reflecting - Rev. Ian Brown***

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*“The breath of life”*

When life is most at risk, we ask about the prognosis. How long is there left? Is there any hope? In our culture many have been able to make the choice about whether they deal with death or not – and most have as little to do with it as possible. Until, like in a pandemic it can't be ignored. It's understandable; not wanting to face mortality, not wanting to feel sadness. But endings are part of life and we all have to face that sometime!

I once did some chaplaincy in an Intensive Care ward and remember spending two harrowing days with a family. They were dealing with their little boy who had drowned. He was lost, resuscitated, there was hope and then hope was lost again. It was the most excruciating, gut-wrenching experience I've ever been part of. But it's the same experience on a continuum of loss that we all know. The news that hope has evaporated is the beginning of a journey of grief.

We come to an end and there are remains. Some remains are emotional, some physical in us

and of course, there are mortal remains. The story today deals with these.

Have you noticed that Ezekiel is an odd character, even by today's standards? God gives Ezekiel a vision and it sounds more like a nightmare! I can imagine a dishevelled Ezekiel turning up to the 'Prophets in Exile' meeting the morning after this dream. 'You won't believe the vision I had last night!' His dreamscape opens with a field of bones. This is not just a graveyard. A whole valley full of the evidence of human destruction of the worst sort! Dry bones. These people have been killed and the annihilation, so bad they have no community left, even to care for the remains.

In Ukraine today people are still dying by the thousands in war, as well as the illnesses and casualties we are seeing across the world. We've had destruction before. In Syria, Afghanistan, Cambodia, and more, we know there are still valleys full of bones. And beyond the aftermath of death there are communities struggling to get on with life. They deal with grief and trauma, wondering, like that question to Ezekiel years ago, "Is there still any hope? Can life be breathed back after all this?" It's a profound question.

Ezekiel confronts an awful reality in a symbolic way. We need to face the problems around us. War, disease and calamity. We also have the dry bones of failure, depression, of loss, of hopes dashed, broken relationships or tragedy. Life can dish up some hard times; dry and hopeless.

Ezekiel faces the pain. He confronts the question; "What can possibly be done in the face of calamity?" Does it speak to us, is it big enough to speak to communities of suffering and the dis-spirited in our time? God, the creator and life giver, told Ezekiel to speak a word of hope. "Speak to the bones, speak to the dead and dispirited!" Maybe even to the church!

He speaks - the word of hope is spoken - step by step the dead and dis-spirited community takes shape by the action of God's life-giving



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breath. "I prophesied as he commanded me and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood..., a vast multitude." Breath, wind, spirit comes to the remains - and they live!

To a world devastated by violence, to those whose lives are threatened by disease or rising seas, or to an individual seeing no hope, this is the same profound and effective Word of God. "I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live." This is a vision, remember. Not magic, not an intervention outside of the laws of nature, but a promise of hope reborn where there was none.

It's a wonderful picture of what hope can do, what spirited words can achieve. But it's more radical and far reaching than these images or our words can grasp.

It's God's spirit working in our deaths and failures and sad endings, that brings new life. If we apply Ezekiel's imagery and ask, "is there hope for us?" My belief is, 'yes'. Yes, new life can be breathed into us, yes there are things that may need to be rebuilt. Yes, new life looks different to the old, like Ezekiel's community had to change and adapt in exile.

This hope of God, this promise of new life beyond hopelessness – is the spirit of Easter. May it be felt in us. May it be real in our church and may it still be proclaimed to the dry bones around us. May the breath of life be at work in us all, by God's grace. Amen.

### **Affirmation of faith from UIW2 p206**

**We believe in God, holy Source of all that is.**

**We believe in God,  
who has spoken the eternal Word  
in Jesus Christ.**

**We believe in God,  
ceaselessly breathing the Spirit into creation.**

**We trust in God's love and wisdom,  
fully revealed in the humanity of Jesus Christ,  
present to us through the Spirit's working**

**in the church and beyond.**

**We believe  
that God is calling the whole creation  
into a future of justice and peace.**

**We share in Christ's risen life,  
and commit ourselves today  
to receive the coming reign of God.**

**To the only God, Three yet One,  
be all honour, glory and praise  
now and forever. Amen.**

### **Singing - O breath of life TiS 409**

#### **Offering**

God who calls us into life, we bring ourselves to you. Whatever these hands can do, whatever these hearts can hold, whatever these minds can imagine and whatever these spirits can connect with - is yours, to use in a way that brings hope and life. Bless us, and bless the gifts we bring. Use us, and use them to bring your love close to where it is needed most. In Jesus' name. Amen.

#### **Notices**

It was Earth Hour last night from 8.30pm to 9.30pm - Did You Switch Off?

### **Prayers for World & Community**

**The refrain in the prayer can be spoken or sung: Lover of all, TiS 737 - go slowly...**

*Lord Jesus Christ, Lover of all  
Spread wide the hem of your garment,  
bring healing, bring peace.*

God of life,

we pray for the breath of your Spirit  
on those who are desolate,  
whose hope has dried up,  
who see only valleys of bones

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*Lord Jesus Christ, Lover of all  
Spread wide the hem of your garment,  
bring healing, bring peace.*

for people in warzones,  
in places of pain, abuse and fear,  
in great sadness, grief and anguish;

*Lord Jesus Christ, Lover of all  
Spread wide the hem of your garment,  
bring healing, bring peace.*

for all living things threatened  
by our human impact on the planet,  
with rising sea levels,  
and changing weather patterns,

*Lord Jesus Christ, Lover of all  
Spread wide the hem of your garment,  
bring healing, bring peace*

And in the quiet we bring to you  
the prayers of our hearts,  
(take a generous time of silent prayer)

as we sing once more:  
*Lord Jesus Christ, Lover of all  
Spread wide the hem of your garment,  
bring healing, bring peace*

and we pray together the words that Jesus taught  
us in the language of our hearts:

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory  
are yours, now and forever. Amen.

### **Singing - Holy Spirit, ever dwelling TiS 410**

You might want to sing this to NETTLETON

### **Blessing**

**Once, maybe, we were like dry bones,  
now we are enfleshed,  
with muscle, bone and sinew.  
Now we are God's people,  
God's Spirit is within us.**

Jesus said to them,  
"Unbind him and let him go."

So go and be God's people  
who act in the unbinding and letting go.  
People of hope and light and peace,  
for ourselves and for each other,  
for the sake of the world.

in the name of love;  
Source, Son and Spirit,  
And all the people say: **Amen**

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**March 27 - April 1, 2023**

**Invitation**

Throughout this 40-day Lenten time, you have been invited to find wilderness spaces where you can go each day and 'shut the door'. It might be outside, or it might be inside. Most likely it will not be silent. Like the people of Israel, wandering in the desert for 40 years, you may have found it hard to keep on track, maybe wondering where you are being led and how you are being fed. This is the week before Holy Week, so keep going. Keep turning up, and making notes or images, and taking time to listen to the sounds of the wilderness within you and around you.

**Monday March 27th**

*Ezekiel 37:1-2 The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry.*

What is it like to be in that valley with God? Can you imagine? Can you capture that image on paper with drawing or words? Is it a current place or situation for you?

*Ezekiel 37-3: He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know."*

Amidst all this barren lifelessness, can there possibly be life? Can you turn that back to God, and say, 'O God, that's up to you.'

*Ezekiel 37:4: Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.*

Now God needs you to speak words of life that will be given to you. Can you? Will you? When?

**Tuesday March 28th**

Sinéad O'Connor sings a gentle version of Psalm 130 from her album Theology:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m920jYP002c>

Where does this psalm lead you? Close your eyes and stay there for a while. In this Lenten wilderness of longing, what is your soul waiting for? Speak it in prayer.

**Wednesday March 29th**

*Psalm 130:6 my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.*

Morning light seeps slowly, gently overcoming the fear-filled empty dark of night. It's gradual and often we sleep through it. Watch carefully. What is dawning in your soul? Can you capture it with words or images?

**Thursday March 30th**

shouting at stones - John 11: 1-45

weeping one, incarnate Son/ you come,  
into the long lament / life; bound and broken  
you / who is the love that will be sent  
to meet  
death / with anointed feet

weeping one, incarnate Son / you shout  
a grief-gravelled 'come out'  
thrown at death's stone  
that locks us in dark's tomb  
and keeps us from love's womb  
and makes us die alone

weeping one, incarnate Son / come, shout  
at all the stones that seal us tight

and as they roll away  
enter our darkness / with the undying light  
of your eternal day

Jennie Gordon, Dad & Daughter, 2014.

**Friday March 31st**

*John 11:43 & 44 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."*

Jesus directed others to unbind Lazarus, and to let him go. Those around were no longer amazed and passive bystanders, they had a part in this miracle. Who or what around you needs unbinding and releasing?

**Saturday April 1st**

*Listen*

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