

5 Lent Year A

March 29, 2020

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Ezekiel 37:1-14 Valley of dry bones brought to life: Israel given new life

Romans 6:16-23 We have become slaves of righteousness, no longer slaves to sin

John 11:17-44 The raising of Lazarus. "Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live."

"Thus says the Lord God: 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."

At the start of this Lenten season I suggested that we look at this as a time to take things away, or add things into our day, that help us move closer to God. I had no idea when I said that how much could be taken away, or how much would be added to our day, thanks to a virus that is spreading across the globe.

Some of my neighbors are not leaving their homes. Their food is being delivered, they are using the telephone and internet to stay connected. Some are going to the stores wearing masks and gloves, and using Clorox wipes on everything they touch. And some are ignoring the social distancing rules; I guess they are assuming the Coronavirus will not land on them. Some are – in my humble opinion – careless and selfish, while others are very anxious and afraid.

I have been talking to some of the preschool parents, and have written two newsletters so far, stressing how important it is for their children – and for them – to create a new routine, a new 'norm' in their day. Some of us may be personally affected by this virus – physically. But what effect will this have on us emotionally and spiritually? I think we have more control than we claim about those emotional and spiritual effects.

In the Book of Ezekiel, we heard that very familiar story about the Valley of Dry Bones. This is an allegory about the Israelites in captivity in Babylonia. They had been defeated, pulled away from their beloved home; and their Temple had been destroyed. They felt dead.

God promised to restore them. There would be an end to their captivity. They would be released from their graves. God said, "I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live and return home." God promised them a 'new life'. After their time in that Valley of Dry Bones, there would be new life. The implied message is to start living into that promise NOW.

John recorded for us the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus had become ill, died, and was buried in a cave. He was in the cave for four days before Jesus came to that cave in Bethany, and commanded Lazarus to "come out".

I can only imagine how Lazarus must have felt about starting his new life. A ham radio friend of mine needed a kidney transplant. But to qualify for the

transplant, he had to desperately need it. Over a period of a couple of years he got very, very weak and sick. It seemed like he was near death before the panel who decides on transplants granted one to him. Within a few months he was pretty much back to his old self: BUT it was definitely a new life for him. He shared with me his prayers for the person who lost his life, whose kidney saved his life.

My friend shared the feeling of other people I have talked with after heart surgery; after surviving cancer; after an organ transplant; after a complicated and hurtful divorce; after getting an addiction under control – these people see life differently after that experience.

The grass looks greener; the colors of flowers are more vibrant.

The expressions of love from family and close friends becomes palpable and visceral.

The gift of every new day becomes priceless.

You and I are now in the Valley of Dry Bones. We are spending our four days in the Cave. The Valley – the Cave – are a time and a place of promise, and of change, for what happens next.

Paul explains that we have that promise because “the Spirit of God dwells in you.”

So how are you spending these days in your cave?

I am considering learning again to play board games with Ruth; although probably not Monopoly, because for the years we played that game – I never won a game: NEVER. Maybe we can re-learn Parcheesi or Sorry...

Building a routine in your day around healthy choices would be a great gift to carry with you when we are set free again.

Building a sense of generosity of quality time shared with partner, children, friends, elderly, people we sense are fighting anxiety or fear about this pandemic: this would be a wonderful habit to carry into our new life when we are set free again.

Do you want your new life to be just like your old life? If so, keep it going now. Rebuild or recreate your daily routine to include those activities.

If not, if you want some changes made, this is the perfect time to start the changes.

God bless you in your journey through this time in the Cave.

Remember the promise we have been given, we carry the Spirit of God in us;

we carry the promise of new life;

we know it to be true; what Jesus stated to Martha:

“I am the resurrection and the life”. Amen.