



Brookline Community Church
Worshiping Apart
Reverend Catherine Merrill, Minister
Fifth Sunday in Lent
March 29, 2020

Centering Ourselves for Worship:

Loving God, Thank you for being with us this week as our list of concerns has outpaced our list of joys. In this time when so many are frightened, isolated, unsure of what they see when they look ahead, it is only right that we are concerned. And it is only right to bring those concerns to you.

But help us to notice the joys too. The funny moments and the things that make us laugh. Because if we do not look for the joys you have given us, for the silver linings, then we are only catching a glimpse of you. Please breathe the breath of life into us. Ease our hearts during this time of worship so we know you are with us. Help us to worship in this concerning and joyful times.

Amen.

Great is Thy Faithfulness

[Click here](#) for a video that will give you the lyrics and someone to sing with. Many thanks to the Music Committee for pointing me in the right direction to find these.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 130

[\[Psalm 130 read for you\]](#). If you'd like to read the Scripture in future services, let me know and we'll get you to make a video we can upload for everyone. It would be great to see more faces in the service]

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.

Lifting Up Our Joys & Concerns:

Out of the depths we cry to you, O Lord.
Lord, hear our voices
and be attentive to our prayers.

We pray for those lifted up with joy
At this time when joy seems to have disappeared
With the toilet paper and the 409.
We celebrate the joys that others have found

We pray for

having a stable if busy job in this increasingly tough time;

For getting Kevin's ice cream birthday cake before everything shut down;

For creatively finding work arounds to complications from staying in our own spaces;

For Ann & John celebrating their second anniversary – on to year three!;

Sharing a family text including a photo of dinner and deciding who wanted a bite of what off each other's plate;

For cherry blossoms on a bike ride along the Charles;

For homemade pizza;

For the safe arrival of Evan Anthony Bierce, Amy's nephew;

For Maine Potato donuts from Holy Donut, and a road trip worth taking;

For the creatures who keep us company;

For Ron's continued speedy recovery from a broken ankle, which looks pretty good, even if there is now a lot of metal in there;

For Flo, Marjorie's mom, released from the hospital to heal from her broken hip and going to Marjorie's sister's home.

For Amanda, Barbara's relative, who got back into US from Canada safely with her dad

For Haley Tiner planning her future as she sends in her deposit check for college in the fall;

For the 1,300 uneventful miles from Florida to New Hampshire;

For the joy of being together for two week of self-quarantine with my beloved wife (him); for the concern about the number of homicide shows he's watching (her)

For [name a joy you'd like to lift up]

We pray for those whose hope is lost,
who feel dried up and cut off from you.
By your grace, open their graves;
bring them back to the land of the living.

We pray for those weighed down by concerns
We know this time is more concerning than most
We ask that you bring your loving presence
Even closer in this time of need.
We pray for

our families who are far flung, Phoenix and Maine and Washington state,
that they be safe when it feels like nowhere is safe;

For Miriam's family, Sanjay's sister, as they deal with close quarters;

For the frustration of business trips cancelled at the last minute;

For those newly diagnosed with autoimmune diseases that they can get
the attention they need during this time of medical crisis;

For the challenge of layoffs and being one of the few who are left to do the
work of many;

For State Senator Martha Fuller Clark, who is in self-quarantine after her
husband tested positive for Covid-19;

For Wisnadine and Quebin, our Compassion International children, from
Haiti and Mexico. We pray for their health, the health of all those who are
helping them in Haiti and Mexico and all those unable to work in Haiti and
Mexico during this trying time;

For the friends and family of Terry House, Bill's brother, who passed away
recently;

For the nursing homes across this country, that Covid-19 not find its way
inside;

For Tim Stewart, Barbara's relative, that his Covid-19 test comes back
negative;

For Dr. Carrie and her wee baby in Italy;

For all the people in the Villages in Florida who are so susceptible to
Covid-19;

For all the folks who are stressing because they don't know how to
manage their fear, that it might be eased;

For all our families being aware of the memories they're making because
we will all remember this time.

For [name a concern you would like to lift up]

We pray for those who weep,
lost and lifeless in fear and regret.
Grant them the peace of your presence;
show them what your love can do.

We pray for those who are dying,
the light of life fading in their eyes.
Help them to believe in you
so that they may live and never die.

We thank you, O Lord,
for having heard our prayers.
Enable us to trust in you,
and thus to see your glory;
through Jesus Christ,
the resurrection and the life who taught us to pray:

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

[For next week, please feel free to send me your joys & concerns and I'll include them in our prayers: minister@bccnh.org or call/text (978) 494-6953.]

SCRIPTURE READING: Ezekiel 37:1-14

[\[Ezekiel 37:1-14 read for you\]](#). If you'd like to read the Scripture in future services, let me know and we'll get you to make a video we can upload for everyone. It would be great to see more faces in the service]

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 round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord GOD, you know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.'

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to

the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, 'Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely." Therefore prophesy, and say to them, 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. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD.'

Reflection on the Scripture:

[Either read or [watch the video](#) of me offering the reflection.]

I do not want to stand in a graveyard of the unburied dead. I do not want to stand with Ezekiel in a valley where the dead have gone unburied for so long that all the flesh has fallen away or been eaten by scavengers and all that surrounds me are the very dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1). Yes, Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief, because I do not want to die.¹ I believe in the resurrection, with all my heart. But I don't want it to happen to me. I'd just like to skip death all together, all the messiness and pain and get to the other side. I do not want to die alone, on a ventilator, with no one who loves me at my side, with only dear, loving, patient, exhausted nurses and doctors in their protective gear keeping themselves safe from my death. And I certainly don't want any of the people I love to die that way. I'm pretty sure I'm not the only one who feels like this, or there wouldn't be so many of us cooped up in our homes and making our social distancing work.

So why read the Valley of the Dry Bones from Ezekiel during a pandemic? Surely there are more hopeful Biblical images we can look at. Images that are not so close to what we fear may happen to us, not some time in the distant future, but before the Fourth of July. Ezekiel has a way of painting a picture, so clearly that we can see it happening on a drive-in movie screen as we watch from our cars. We see the bones, we can hear the noise, the rattling (Ezekiel 37:7). It so vivid. But step back for a minute and actually follow the steps. God bring Ezekiel to the valley. God tells Ezekiel what to say and the bodies come together. God tells Ezekiel what to say and the breath of life, the breath of life from way back in Genesis at the very start of time, rolls through them. You can call it breath or spirit or the four winds and in Hebrew it is all the same word. It

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor, "Can These Bones Live? *The Christian Century* 113, no. 9 (1996): 291.

isn't Ezekiel's breath, although God works through Ezekiel's words. It's God's breath. It's God doing all the work of bringing new life to a valley of desolation.

We're in the middle of a pandemic and we want to do more, we want to do something to make it all go away, to make it all stop. Of course we do. We want it to be like so many other situations we face, where we do and the world changes. We're also in the middle of Lent, where we remind ourselves that we are not in charge of everything. Just some things. So we stay home and shop for neighbors and figure out how to support our local businesses. We find work for folks who have been laid off. We support the effort of the local homeless agencies who are performing heroics to get folks somewhere safe for those without homes. We continue to support the work Marguerite's Place is doing to help victims of domestic violence at a time when domestic violence is rising. We don't hoard, or we try not to hoard much. I may have more boxes of elbow macaroni than one woman really needs, but that was more absent-minded buying than intentional acquisition. We do all that we can. And it will not be enough. We need talented people to figure out a vaccine. We need talented people to do the loaves and the fishes thing on ventilators so one ventilator is serving more than one person. We do all these things. And it will not be enough. Because God is what can bring newness and hope into a situation we cannot solve ourselves.

That is the message of Lent. Do what you can but don't ever forget that only God is all powerful.

Notice this too. When God has brought life to those dry, dry rattling bones, God explains who those bones are: *these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.'* (Ezekiel 37:11) These are not the ones who were slain, but those who have survived and been sent into exile. They are the one far from the life they have known and they have fallen into despair. They despair because they have convinced themselves that God is absent from them, that God has written them off.

As a prophet, Ezekiel is responding to this despair with a simple and clear message. God is as near as the next breath you take.² God is the breath of life, the wind, the wind from all four corners of the world. Just breathe and God is with you. Sure, they are still facing great loss, still facing a present in exile that they do not want and did not choose. But God is there with them.

That is the message of Lent too. God is with you, even when you least believe it.

² Margaret Odell, "Commentary on the First Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14" from "Lectionary Commentaries for April 6, 2014: Fifth Sunday in Lent", Working Preacher, https://www.workingpreacher.org/wp_print_all.aspx?lectionary_calendar_id=467&print_type=comm&is_spanish=0 (accessed October 31, 2019).

Yes, we want a God who will rescue us from death, who will delete it from this world and find another way around that pain and loss, around the horror of those rattling dry, dry bones.

But what we have is a God who resurrects us from the dead, who puts an end to death by going straight through it instead of dancing around it. God creates life in the middle of grief, love in the middle of loss, faith in the middle of despair.³ We can do none of those things on our own. God does that for us. God resurrects us from our big and little deaths as individuals and as a community. God shows us by example that the only road to Easter runs smack through Good Friday.⁴

We may not want to die. We may not want to stand in a graveyard. But the message from God is that the only way to get out on the other side is to go through. To breathe the breath of life that has been there from the beginning. To breathe the breath of life that is always there, even when we are most sure we are all alone and God has abandoned us. Even when we are most sure that we are most worth abandoning. Breathe the breath of life in all its strength and power. We must act as best we can. We must recognize that God is what brings new life to situations we cannot solve by ourselves.

I am the resurrection and life (John 11:25) Jesus says. Not “I will be”. But “I am”.⁵ Right now. Right here. In the face of death itself. The message of Lent is to breathe that truth straight through the rattling, dry, dry valleys our lives.

Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness

This is a hymn usually sung on Pentecost. It's one of my favorites, but it's not in our hymnal. Since I thought it went with today's lesson from Ezekiel, I wanted to sing it with you.

[Click here](#) for a video that will give you the lyrics (most of the time) and someone to sing with. The lyrics when they pan to the pianist are below.

Spirit, spirit of gentleness,
blow through the wilderness, calling and free,
Spirit, spirit of restlessness,
stir me from placidness, wind, wind on the sea.

You moved on the waters, you called to the deep,
then you coaxed up the mountains from the valleys of sleep;
and over the eons you called to each thing;
“Awake from your slumbers and rise on your wings.”

³ Taylor, 291.

⁴ Taylor, 291.

⁵ Taylor, 291.

You swept through the desert, you stung with the sand
and you goaded your people with a law and a land;
and when they were blinded with idols and lies,
then you spoke through your prophets to open their eyes.

You sang in a stable, you cried from a hill,
then you whispered in silence when the whole world was still;
and down in the city you called once again,
when you blew through your people on the rush of the wind.

You call from tomorrow, you break ancient schemes.
From the bondage of sorrow all the captives dream dreams;
our women see visions, our men clear their eyes.
With bold new decisions your people arise.

A Prayer to Send us Back Out into the World

Holy God, giver of life,
we thank you for raising us up
and joining us together
as one people, your people,
flesh and bone in the body of Christ.

Stay with us as we breath the breath of life
Your breath
Your constant reminder that you are with us.
Stay with us as we grapple with our limitations
Knowing that we can only do so much
And only you can bring new life to the dark valley.

Stay with us as we walk the road that leads to Easter
Smack through Good Friday
Accepting that the only way to the other side is through.

As you have delivered us from death,
use our lives to proclaim the good news
of new life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: # 839 "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."](#)

[The Music Ministry crew made this bit of video for us, so we could all sing
together, with each other and our former selves!]

Here ends our worship, now let our service begin.



PRAYER LIST (3/29/20)

If you know those on this list, call on them & tell them we are praying for them. If you know others who should be added to this list please give their names to the minister or a deacon.

- Rev. Tom Atherton, failing from Parkinson's
- Friends & family of Nell Smallwood, Beatrice Maude Charewicz, Win Hall, Bruce Garvin, Louise Price, Eddy Whitcomb, Shirley Jeffreys, Hazel Corey, Jean & Duke, David & Dougy Connors, Jerry King, Tre Rouse, and Tasha Feller.
- For those who are struggling with depression, addiction, mental health issues, and in their marriages
- Luca, Amy's nephew, as his new treatment appears to be having effect
- Ethel Long who is recovering from hip replacement surgery while she helps Ron get back on his feet after breaking an ankle and getting a pacemaker put in
- God's grace and healing for us all
- Dave, continuing to recover now that he is in remission
- Pat Tiner, Candy's mother-in-law, who died of a heart attack. Prayers for the whole Tiner clan, including Ciara, who misses her Nana terribly
- Those affected by the corona virus around the world and those working to limit its impact
- The families who step up when needed, whether we're the ones stepping up or the ones in need
- The homeless, who have nowhere to shelter in isolation, and whose places of refuge (libraries, malls, shelters) are closing down, that we may find a more productive approach to homelessness.
- Those suffering from domestic violence, who are caught at home with their abusers at a time of rising stress, and therefore rising abuse, that they might find safe havens.
- All those who are dealing with health problems at the moment, all those whose surgeries have been postponed, all those who need medical attention and worry they are taking attention away from the pandemic response.
- For our families who are far flung, Phoenix and Maine and Washington state, that they be safe when it feels like nowhere is safe;
- For Miriam's family, Sanjay's sister, as they deal with close quarters;
- For the frustration of business trips cancelled at the last minute;
- For the challenge of layoffs and being one of the few who are left to do the work of many;
- For State Senator Martha Fuller Clark, who is in self-quarantine after her husband tested positive for Covid-19;

- For Wisnadine and Quebin, our Compassion International children, from Haiti and Mexico. We pray for their health, the health of all those who are helping them in Haiti and Mexico and all those unable to work in Haiti and Mexico during this trying time;
- For the friends and family of Terry House, Bill's brother, who passed away recently;
- For the nursing homes across this country, that Covid-19 not find its way inside
- For Tim Stewart, Barbara's relative, that his Covid-19 test comes back negative;
- For Dr. Carrie and her wee baby in Italy;
- For all the people in the Villages in Florida who are so susceptible to Covid-19;
- That the stress of all the folks who don't know how to manage their fear might be eased;
- For all our families being aware of the memories they're making because we will all remember this time.
- Individuals serving in our military & their families

Household Prayer: Morning

I rise, O God, awakened by your Word, to live another day. Lead me in your path. Show me the steps to take toward greater faith. Hold me in your care as I move through this Holy Week where the shadows deepen even in the daylight. Hosanna! Save me now, dear God! Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

I come to the darkness of night, O God, tired and ready for a sweet respite in your care. Keep me safe from all harm, and bring me to the morning light with renewed strength. In Jesus' holy name, I pray. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

Take a minute to read the story of Jesus calling Lazarus out of the tomb ([John 11: 1-45](#)) Why did Jesus weep in John 11:35? Was it out of compassion for Mary and Martha? Out of love for his friend Lazarus? Out of frustration with the people's lack of understanding or faith? Think about someone in your life who is grieving. Find a way to extend to that person the grace and peace of Christ.

Daily Awareness Reflection

At the end of the day, I've been asking myself the following questions. I jot down the answers and ask them again the next evening. I've found it helps me to remain centered as well as increasing my awareness of God in my life. It takes about 10 minutes.

1. Slow down. Stop. Prepare yourself to pray by becoming aware of the love with which God looks on you ...
2. Note the gifts God has given you today. Give thanks to God for them ...
3. Ask God that the next few minutes be a time of special grace and revelation ...
4. With God, review the day. Look at the stirrings of your heart, your thoughts, and your choices as the day progressed. Which have been of God? Which have not? What does God want to say to you about both? ...
5. Ask God for forgiveness for any failure or omission, and for healing from their effects ...
6. Look forward to the following day, and plan concretely with God how to live it according to God's desire for your life ...

From Elizabeth Liebert's *The Soul of Discernment* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2015), p. 31.

Announcements:

This time of isolation can be very difficult. You may know someone who needs some support beyond what you can provide.

Suicide prevention: 1-800-273-8255

Sexual assault: 1-800-656-4673

Domestic violence: 1-800-799-7233

We're in this together

Melanie, our state senator asked to pass along the following two pieces of information:

- If people want to know the latest status of COVID 19 in NH and the Emergency orders to date, go to www.nh.gov/covid19/
- A great video explaining Covid-19, what and how we fight it and why what we are doing is so important: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgBla7RepXU>

Everyone have a good week and be safe!