

WHO NEEDS UNBINDING?

4/29/20 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA (*via Zoom*)
Lent 5 (A): Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

It's a strange thing to imagine the pile of dry bones described in Ezekiel—rattling all about—lifeless without hope of ever living again! First of all, it's an uncomfortable image to consider in the midst of this pandemic, knowing there are so many people around the world struggling to stay alive. And, yet, there is such hope in this story. Divine breath and the Word of God stirs the bones into life.

We all have days—maybe more lately than usual—where we feel completely wiped-out and ready to add ourselves to the heap of those who feel so dried-up they've actually given up. But as we breathe into our own bodies, we can feel God's presence moving through us. Our dry bones—our dry spirits—are refreshed.

We find a similar sentiment in the reading from John. A man has died. To be specific, a friend of Jesus's has died. Martha and Mary called for Jesus to come to the bedside of their brother, Lazarus, because he was sick. But Jesus didn't make it in time, so when he arrives, he is so upset that he weeps. Jesus loved this friend, and he would never have wanted to let down Martha and Mary in this way.

So, Jesus performs a miracle. We don't know whether Lazarus wasn't actually dead, and simply comes out of a coma when Jesus calls his name, or whether he literally brings Lazarus back to life. But what we do know is, in that moment, Jesus restored hope to Martha and Mary, and everyone else around them.

He says, "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." And then, asks: "Do you believe this?"

That's what we're being asked. Do we believe that God truly is our source and center? Our breath? Our life? Neither Martha nor Mary would have chosen that path to come to know who Jesus was in a deeper way, but he says, "this happened, so that you can believe." And the miracle is they did believe.

Challenging times are not God's way of punishing us, but in those challenging times, we figure out what's really important, and in the midst of that we have the opportunity to know Jesus in a deeper way.

Like Martha and Mary, we have the opportunity to hang onto our hope. In a couple of weeks, even though we won't be together in a church building, there will be Easter, and eventually; we will come out of this COVID-19 crisis new

people. It's not a path we would have chosen or expected, but it is where we are. We can let hopelessness overtake us, or we can let God in.

As Martha, Mary and the others grab onto that hope, Jesus calls for Lazarus to be unbound. In the same way the bones are given breath and they grow sinews, flesh and are covered with skin, Lazarus is unbound, his entire body once again free to breathe, to live fully.

So, I wonder. Where in your life have you bound yourself—or someone else—up in a box that is constraining and not at all helpful? Where have you shut yourself off from hope in a way that feels constricting? Who might you need to forgive? What old thought pattern might you let go of? What story about what you are and aren't capable of are you ready to re-write?

Unbind her. Unbind him. Unbind yourself. Let it go.

Let God's breath fill you once again with life. Let it go, and let in God.

-AMEN