

**Breathe on me, breath of God  
Fill me with life anew  
That as you love, so I may love  
And do what you would do.**

~ Edwin Hatch, D.D., 1878

The lectionary readings for this week provide bold images of God's power to bring new life, to instill hope, and to summon the faithful to participate in God's redemptive work in the world. From John's gospel, we read of Jesus raising his friend Lazarus not just from sleep but from the stinky in-the-tomb death that has imprisoned him for the past four days. We have the "dry bones" text from Ezekiel, and Paul's passage from Romans that culminates with "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."

### **What do we imagine Resurrection to be?**

Martha was able to give the "right" answer to Jesus' words of assurance that her brother would rise again. "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Resurrection is the promise of eternal life after we die. Understood in this narrow context, however, it is a promise made for some distant and abstract future, with little meaningful impact on her life in the present. It strikes me, though, that Jesus wants her to understand resurrection as a deeper, more prevalent truth: "I am resurrection, and I am life." Spoken by the Word made Flesh, who lives among us, Jesus promises resurrection and life in the here and now, and not just after we die. In other words, there are immediate implications of resurrection in the present moment. *What does the "now" of resurrection look and feel like to you? How are you seeing opportunities and options opening for you, for us as a community, to love and live well in the midst of calamity and grief?*

### **Can these bones live?**

In one of the most fascinating and bizarre writings in the Bible, God leads the prophet Ezekiel to a valley filled with dry bones. Through a curious exchange of questions – "Mortal, can these bones live?" – and "right" replies – "O Lord, only you know." – we get to peak over the prophet's shoulder to watch as the dusty and desiccated bones are knit back together. Standing upright with muscles and skin in place, they lack one thing: breath. And so the Lord tells the prophet to prophesy to the Breath, "and the breath came into them, and they lived." Ezekiel lived during the time of Babylonian Exile. The people of Israel thought that God had abandoned them. They wondered if their suffering had a purpose. Most of all, they wondered, "How can God move on with God's people, in a transformed and renewed state?" *What places of exile do you find yourself in these uncertain times? Where do you need the breath of God to fill you with life anew?*

### **Unbind him, and let him go.**

It seems to me that the community is given a role to play in this resurrection story. While it is Jesus who calls Lazarus to come out of the cave and it is Lazarus who rises and walks out of the tomb, it falls upon his friends and neighbors to release him from the strips of burial cloth that keep him bound. In doing so, Jesus invites the gathered community to be co-workers in the renewal and restoration of the world. *Have you ever considered how your actions, words, and relationships help restore life? How do we participate in God's movement in our lives and in the lives of our neighbors?*

These familiar texts of dry bones coming to life and Lazarus walking out of his tomb are the texts we need for these challenging and frightening days. These texts are an excellent reminder that we worship a God of life and of promise. This is us. This is us as the People of God learning new ways of connecting deeper with God and our neighbors. This is the church coming to life in new ways to maintain community and to live outside of our buildings.

In this time of uncertainty, when we are grieving the loss of normalcy and are struggling to imagine what the future might hold, may we trust God to call us out of this place where darkness and death lurk all around us. May we seek to unbind one another from tombs of worry, financial distress, and isolation. And, may we feel God's promises of life and hope deep within our bones.