Fifth Sunday in Lent  
Online Worship – March 29, 2020  
10:00 AM

INVITATION  
Thank you for joining us on-line or by phone! As we gather, please be sure that your device is in the mute mode to avoid feedback and background noise. This service will be interactive but only by using the “chat” feature. If you connect by phone, you are invited to mute your device. Also, you are invited to create sacred space where you are: to light a candle, to breath deeply, to hold a leaf or flower, to gaze out a window or at a picture that centers you. Let us be present to the Spirit that brings us together and loves us where we are!

GATHERING MUSIC

WELCOME

CENTERING MOMENT  
Thompson/Scruggs  
“Sanctuary” (sung by all while remaining muted on Zoom)

Lord, prepare me to be a Sanctuary,  
Pure and holy, tried and true;  
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living Sanctuary for you.  
https://soundcloud.com/user-109697532/vrp-20200327-sanctuary/s-l4kcJYv60EZ

CALL TO WORSHIP¹  
Out of my depths, O God, I cry to you.  
Are you there?  
I know I’m far from perfect,  
but if perfection were required,  
who would pass muster?  
So, I wait and I hope;  
like a sentry waits for the morning.  
Help me to stay alert, and keep an open heart  
for whatever comes.

THE LORD’S PRAYER (Second Church follows the version of the Lord’s Prayer that is offered below. However, you are invited to say this prayer aloud in the tradition that brings you the most comfort: debt/debtors; sins/sin; trespasses/trespass).

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 debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

¹ From “Psalms for a New World,” by Christine Robinson at http://doubterpsalms.blogspot.com/.
THE SCRIPTURE LESSONS
(This reading is from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. You may follow along in your own Bible or at www.biblegateway.com. At this website you can even explore other versions of the reading. Do as the Spirit leads you!)

Ezekiel 37:1-14

37 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. 2 He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. 3 He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” 4 Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 5 Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 6 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.”

7 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. 8 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. 9 Then he said to me, “Prophesy 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.” 10 I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

11 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.’ 12 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. 13 And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 14 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.”

Romans 8:6

6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

MEDITATION “O, Breath”2

Let us Pray: Loving Spirit, grant us presence, pure hearts and loving purpose in all we say and hear, knowing You are with us and that You speak to us in so many ways. Amen.

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I’ve never known quite what to do with Ezekiel’s vision of dry bones coming alive again. And given what we’re up against these days, I can’t say that I was excited about taking on

today’s suggested lectionary. Dry bones. Mass death. Grim valleys and the deep hopelessness of the people. Our hearts and minds can already go to dark places so easily with all that we are currently faced with. Our fears of death, disease and isolation prompted by the COVID19 pandemic can readily overtake us every time we turn on the tv, pick up a paper, click on a news link or simply check in with one another. Things are just weird and so tragic right now!

It’s all a little bit too much like what Ezekiel looks out upon after God takes him by the hand and sets him down in the middle of a valley full of bones. Ezekiel sees right away that he’s in the middle of a valley of literal displacement and dismembering. Dry bones, separated from the breath of life – sinews, flesh, skin, breath – all separate from one another.

The Israelites felt that way too. Those that had survived the Babylonian war are now living in exile, separated from all they loved and knew and their temple has been destroyed. They aren’t allowed to assemble, to gather, to live out their normal routines and spiritual practices. Families, communities and sacred gatherings separated if not decimated. They are suffering from the desolate affliction of fear, hopelessness and disconnection. They are struggling to know God and to live as the people God has called them to be.

Ezekiel has prophesied from the valley of dry bones and invoked the winds of the Spirit, prompted to do so by God’s commanding intention and promise. Ezekiel focuses and leans on God repeatedly to bring this vision to life. And God prompts him again and again. “Prophesy to these bones…say to them…prophesy to the breath…tell them I will put my Spirit within you.”

O, Breath!

Where would Ezekiel have been without this faithful trust in God? I imagine that prophesying takes a lot of breath too! And as Ezekiel does so, breaths and trusts and speaks God’s words, he comes to understand that what is coming to life is a divine promise: God is promising that we will live, no matter what. God is here. The Ruah, the Spirit is alive and well. Resurrection will happen! It’s not a matter of if, or when….but right now! Here, in this place, this valley, this time. Right this very moment.

O, Breath!

How different would our lives be in this moment if we took a deep breath and trusted God’s promise of new life? Could we let go of some of our immediate fear and anxiety to imagine a new way of being present in the world? Could we as a church let go of old ways and imagine a new way of being church in the world? I know that quite a few people who depend on me were the ones reminding me to breath these past few weeks as I tried to figure out how on earth to bring worship alive online! Would we have imagined worshipping the way we are
today, from all different places, as we are now? Unexpected times lead us to unexpected surprises and new, filling ways of living.

It’s hard to let go of that which is familiar and comfortable, even if it really doesn’t bring us all the breath and life we need. It’s brings security and familiarity, even when it may be dry and brittle. Habits and routines die hard. And without the Spirit, they can easily become rattling bones that we waste too much time trying to breath life into. But what if we took a faithful breath and allowed the Spirit to do the breathing with us?

What has helped me in my most anxious and breathless moments these past few weeks is to remember that if all else fails, simply breath and focus on the moment. God, the Spirit, the TRUE BREATH is in the moment! So, remember and then practice with faithful intention the things that have given you life and helped you to breath this week. When I asked this question yesterday on Facebook, so many of you shared! Answers ranged from:

- Listening to music, playing music, making art
- Meditating, exercising, sleeping without guilt
- Taking walks outdoors – in the woods, along the shore, on trails, around the neighborhood, in their own gardens
- Joining new online groups to learn new crafts or skills like knitting, making flies for fly fishing, DIY projects
- Spending extra time with partners, household family members, connecting by Zoom, Facetime, phone calls, cards and letters
- Keeping a routine, getting dressed, cleaning house, baking
- Not taking for granted this extra time to just be
- Breathing!

So…what brings you life, joy, grace? What affirms God’s steadfast love? What’s resurrecting your spirits in these unnerving times? Wherever you are, whatever COVID-19 has done, is doing, or will do to your life and the life of the church, know that you are not alone. We are in this together and we are surrounded by God’s steadfast love.

Amen
PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God, your faithful love surrounds us, and we give you thanks for the gift of life, and the gift of new life, and for the many ways you sustain and nurture us.

We come before you this day, some of us tired and hungry, looking for your word to sustain us, your spirit to comfort us. Some of us come bruised and sore, looking for healing, longing for wholeness. Some of us come despairing, wondering what has happened. Some of us come breathless, exhausted and depleted of life’s joy. We all come to You, praying for a world on edge, tense with fear and uncertainty, even hatred and violence in our hearts, on our minds, in our actions.
We come, looking for good news in the midst of the world’s bad news. We come, seeking forgiveness for our wrongs, seeking to know your presence when we feel so alone, seeking to know your heart and will for a world with so much need. And so we offer you our prayers, and we listen for yours.

[Prayers shared here.]

Let your grace breathe life into us, O God. May we be surrounded by your love, your peace, your hope. Open our eyes and our hearts to see you in unexpected places, guide our hands to show your love. You are a God of surprises, a God of peace, a God of hope, a God of love. Fill us with your spirit, that we may widen the circle until all the world knows your grace.

We pray these and all things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

BENEDICTION
Go in peace, love and care for one another in Christ’s name, and may the blessing of God be with you -
- May the road rise to meet you,
- may the wind be always at your back,
- may the sun shine warm upon your face,
- may the rains fall soft upon your fields,
and until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of his hand. Amen.

SUNG BLESSING
(Mute will be turned off in Zoom. We will sing once together and then attempt a round!) □
Go now in peace,
Go now in peace,
May the love of God surround you,
Everywhere, everywhere, you may be.


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ANNOUNCEMENTS