

Morning Worship 29th March

Call to Worship

God of all goodness we come before you, knowing that when all seems to be lost, you never leave us and never let us down. Help us to discover how our faith in you has the power to change, even in the darkest moments, giving us strength to continue our journey with you.

Through our loving lord.

Amen.

Last week the elders played the following song at the beginning of the service. It helped prepare us for worship, which is why that I wanted you all to start this week's service with the same song.

Praise <https://youtu.be/ZugvUQ4m90U> Be still for the presence of the Lord

Prayer

Loving lord

Thank you for bringing our church family together in our very own valley of dry bones.

Your hope alone breathes life to the dry bones and our weary souls.

Thank you for showing us the way and helping us to support those around us.

Your spirit helps build our strength to hold up others in their time of need.

Thank you for assisting us to keep the spirits up of others in our community,

Your love makes us smile at the simplest of sun rises.

Children's Message

"I will make my breath enter you and you will come to life"

Children's Sermon for Sunday 29th March

So...who like's pasta? I sure do! Spaghetti Bolognese, Carbonara, Arrabiata, Lasagna! I am getting hungry just thinking about it!

If you have some, take ONE single piece of any pasta you have in your cupboard. (No more than one piece, for pasta is very precious right now!)

Once you have one piece of pasta, have a look at it. Does it look different to cooked pasta? What do you think it tastes like? Take a bite if you want to but I can guarantee it won't be very nice!

What do you think is missing? Well for starters, its raw! Pasta needs to be cooked! First you place it into boiling, salted water, then you take it out after about 10 minutes when it's soft.

The dry pasta reminds me of the bones in the valley in the story of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel was in a valley surrounded by dry bones. The Lord told him to speak to the bones and they would come back to life.

So Ezekiel did just that! The bones gained flesh. Ezekiel spoke to the wind and the bodies began to breathe again. The bodies came back to life.

At this time, we must pray to God that he will breathe life back into us. To add sauce to our dry pasta so it tastes good. To breathe health back into our lives, and to embrace us with his

presence so the world will soon return to normal. It's a very scary time for all of us right now, and many of us feel like nothing good can come along. Just like we know that if we cook raw food, that a good meal will come of it, we know that if we pray to God, he will breathe life back into us.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, sometimes we face hard things and life seems hopeless. Help us to remember the lesson of the dry bones. If you can make dry bones live again, you can make something good out of the hard things in our life. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Praise <https://youtu.be/OCtneZbJb3Q> - a little video to sing along to!

Readings

Ezekiel 37 v1-14

The Valley of Dry Bones

37 I felt the powerful presence of the LORD, and his spirit took me and set me down in a valley where the ground was covered with bones. **2** He led me all around the valley, and I could see that there were very many bones and that they were very dry. **3** He said to me, "Mortal man, can these bones come back to life?"

I replied, "Sovereign LORD, only you can answer that!"

4 He said, "Prophecy to the bones. Tell these dry bones to listen to the word of the LORD.

5 Tell them that I, the Sovereign LORD, am saying to them: I am going to put breath into you and bring you back to life. **6** I will give you sinews and muscles, and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you and bring you back to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD."

7 So I prophesied as I had been told. While I was speaking, I heard a rattling noise, and the bones began to join together. **8** While I watched, the bones were covered with sinews and muscles, and then with skin. But there was no breath in the bodies.

9 God said to me, "Mortal man, prophecy to the wind.^[a] Tell the wind that the Sovereign LORD commands it to come from every direction, to breathe into these dead bodies, and to bring them back to life."

10 So I prophesied as I had been told. Breath entered the bodies, and they came to life and stood up. There were enough of them to form an army.

11 God said to me, "Mortal man, the people of Israel are like these bones. They say that they are dried up, without any hope and with no future. **12** So prophecy to my people Israel and tell them that I, the Sovereign LORD, am going to open their graves. I am going to take them out and bring them back to the land of Israel. **13** When I open the graves where my people are buried and bring them out, they will know that I am the LORD. **14** I will put my breath in them, bring them back to life, and let them live in their own land. Then they will know that I am the LORD. I have promised that I would do this—and I will. I, the LORD, have spoken."

John 11 1-45

The Death of Lazarus

11 A man named Lazarus, who lived in Bethany, became sick. Bethany was the town where Mary and her sister Martha lived. (**2** This Mary was the one who poured the perfume on the

Lord's feet and wiped them with her hair; it was her brother Lazarus who was sick.) 3 The sisters sent Jesus a message: "Lord, your dear friend is sick."

4 When Jesus heard it, he said, "The final result of this sickness will not be the death of Lazarus; this has happened in order to bring glory to God, and it will be the means by which the Son of God will receive glory."

5 Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 Yet when he received the news that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for two more days. 7 Then he said to the disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

8 "Teacher," the disciples answered, "just a short time ago the people there wanted to stone you; and are you planning to go back?"

9 Jesus said, "A day has twelve hours, doesn't it? So those who walk in broad daylight do not stumble, for they see the light of this world. 10 But if they walk during the night they stumble, because they have no light." 11 Jesus said this and then added, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I will go and wake him up."

12 The disciples answered, "If he is asleep, Lord, he will get well."

13 Jesus meant that Lazarus had died, but they thought he meant natural sleep. 14 So Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, 15 but for your sake I am glad that I was not with him, so that you will believe. Let us go to him."

16 Thomas (called the Twin) said to his fellow disciples, "Let us all go along with the Teacher, so that we may die with him!"

Jesus the Resurrection and the Life

17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had been buried four days before. 18 Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, 19 and many Judeans had come to see Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother's death.

20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "If you had been here, Lord, my brother would not have died! 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask him for."

23 "Your brother will rise to life," Jesus told her.

24 "I know," she replied, "that he will rise to life on the last day."

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; 26 and those who live and believe in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

27 "Yes, Lord!" she answered. "I do believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

Jesus Weeps

28 After Martha said this, she went back and called her sister Mary privately. "The Teacher is here," she told her, "and is asking for you." 29 When Mary heard this, she got up and hurried out to meet him. (30 Jesus had not yet arrived in the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.) 31 The people who were in the house with Mary comforting her

followed her when they saw her get up and hurry out. They thought that she was going to the grave to weep there.

³² Mary arrived where Jesus was, and as soon as she saw him, she fell at his feet. “Lord,” she said, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died!”

³³ Jesus saw her weeping, and he saw how the people with her were weeping also; his heart was touched, and he was deeply moved. ³⁴ “Where have you buried him?” he asked them. “Come and see, Lord,” they answered.

³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ “See how much he loved him!” the people said.

³⁷ But some of them said, “He gave sight to the blind man, didn't he? Could he not have kept Lazarus from dying?”
Lazarus Is Brought to Life

³⁸ Deeply moved once more, Jesus went to the tomb, which was a cave with a stone placed at the entrance. ³⁹ “Take the stone away!” Jesus ordered.

Martha, the dead man's sister, answered, “There will be a bad smell, Lord. He has been buried four days!”

⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believed?” ⁴¹ They took the stone away. Jesus looked up and said, “I thank you, Father, that you listen to me.

⁴² I know that you always listen to me, but I say this for the sake of the people here, so that they will believe that you sent me.” ⁴³ After he had said this, he called out in a loud voice,

“Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ He came out, his hands and feet wrapped in grave cloths, and with a cloth around his face. “Untie him,” Jesus told them, “and let him go.”

The Plot against Jesus

⁴⁵ Many of the people who had come to visit Mary saw what Jesus did, and they believed in him.

Praise

SERMON – VALLEY OF THE DRY BONES 29.3.20

I wonder if you ever look at the situations vacant column in the local paper. If you do, what do you think might your response be if you saw the following ad:

Job Title: Old Testament Prophet

Location of employment: wherever God sends

Salary: Nil

Duties: whatever God directs

Doesn't sound too immediately attractive does it? I don't think we would be in a hurry to apply for this job would we? No job security, no comfortable pension to look forward to or specified hours of work. It's not an attractive prospect that would give us a secure income and enable us to settle down to a happy family life. In Ezekiel's case, add to that, that he was called to be a prophet in a time of exile in Babylon. The people of God had been through the terror of being overrun by the Babylonians and were shocked and traumatised by their experiences. Jerusalem had fallen and God knew that they needed a prophet like Ezekiel to show them how far they had fallen, how they had continually failed to abide by His laws and worship Him as was right.

Ezekiel had a tough job ahead of him and needed to make the people see the error of their ways and to return to worshipping God and living according to His laws. Can you tell that I have a certain degree of sympathy for those called to such a difficult, but of course, very important task? In Luke 16 in verse 29 – the story of the rich man and Lazarus we read “Abraham replied, they have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them”. Clearly to be a prophet was an important God given task – God’s guidance was given through them to the people.

In the previous chapter to our reading we hear that even though the people had brought dishonour to God’s name by practising idolatry in foreign lands but for the honour of His name God was prepared to do the following “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a new heart of flesh”. These verses seem to indicate a note of renewal and to give to people some sign of hope for the future. How heartening these words must have been!

Perhaps in order to make His message plain God gives us this picture in the following chapter, as He knows we fragile humans are often convinced of a truth when we see it before our own eyes. We come to the extraordinary passage of our reading - the valley of dry bones. I call it extraordinary as through the eyes of our imagination we can all be there in that valley and picture the bones coming together becoming covered with flesh and having the breath coming into them. The extent of God’s mercy to the people after their many years of faithlessness is staggering – he tells them in verse 14 of our reading “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”.

Hope of a return to their home after many years of exile must have seemed like a balm to their weary souls. Return to Jerusalem and worship in the temple meant a return to their proper place as God’s chosen people. Undeserved but given as a free gift of grace. How blessed are we to be given this same gift of grace freely given by our loving God.

Perhaps in reading this passage we may think that this act of mercy from God and His wish to bring His people close to Him once more is only for Old Testament times. However when we look at “the idols” of our day are we in any better a position than were the people of God in Ezekiel’s time? We sometimes limit God’s involvement in our lives – make Him a Sunday God and fail to make Him a part of everything we do. We are often challenged by conflicting desires to go our own way rather than God’s and we may need to listen to the messages prophets like Ezekiel gave as well as the many teachings of Jesus in the New Testament.

Have we at some period in our lives felt dried out like the bones in the valley, far from God, in a dry place distant from God? Have we felt pulled in different directions and spiritually challenged? We may feel burdened by our troubles. Situations such as bereavement, illness whether physical or mental, unemployment or many other causes can bring us to a low place. Maybe we feel unable to do as God directs, lacking confidence in His confidence in us. We may wish for an easier life without the difficulties being a Christian sometimes confronts us with. Have we reached that depth when we feel we have no more left to give? I am sure that many of us will have reached these low points to some degree, at some stage – this time in a spiritual desert is not uncommon but what do we do when we are in this desert – in this valley of the dry bones?

If we look back at our reading we see that what gave the bones life was the word of God given to them by Ezekiel and the breath that was breathed into them was sent by God. When we are in our desert place how can we gain hope from this? We claim to be God’s people so we need only to look at the faithfulness of God throughout the ages in the Bible to see that we are part of the continuing family of faith today and why would God not honour our coming to Him in our low place? He knows all about us so we cannot hide

anything from Him and if we have gone astray and not lived as He would have us live He waits only for our heartfelt “sorry Lord” to bring us back into a right relationship with Him. As did the word of God give life in the valley of the dry bones it gives life to us too and inspires us with renewed hope to live in Him.

Recognising when we are in that dry place and need help is not always easy. We can see our need for help as a weakness, we can tend to soldier on, ignoring our difficulties, feeling that we should not need to bother God or others. Then, we do not seek help from God or a brother or sister but it is not a failure to need help and in our relationship with God we need honesty to move forward. We need what Ezekiel’s listeners needed – God’s word which is the breath of life to us! David in Psalm 32 says “Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them, You are a hiding place for me, you preserve me from trouble, you surround me with glad cries of deliverance”. We too like David can be confident that God will help us – in sometimes unexpected ways.

As a worshipping community I am sure that we are willing to help those around us in their valley of the dry bones to help them back to the place where they can feel they are renewed in heart and mind to follow where God leads and to take their part in His family here at Emmanuel. Are there those here today in that valley? I hope you too find here a place where you can feel comfortable and welcomed and a place where the worshipping family is willing to help you in your time of trouble. I too have had my difficulties and found help and encouragement here in our fellowship and God has given me today a challenge to deliver His message – I am only here at God’s leading and with the encouragement of others. This would not be my natural choice but I have done my best to honour God’s leading. God sometimes takes us to difficult places but never leaves us without help being available to us.

I pray that we are all enlivened by God’s word and given the breath of encouragement to walk in God’s ways now and always. As Ezekiel followed where God led, I can think of no better path to follow for us all.
Amen.

Praise <https://youtu.be/o469PRLdbHU> Will you come and follow me

Prayers of intercession

Let us pray

Lord,

This is a difficult time for all of us. Your people are struggling lord. Give them peace of mind to be able to cope with the lockdown where families and friends have for various reasons been unable to see one another.

Your people are struggling Lord and are frightened as to what the future holds.

Lord protect us from the ravages of this disease that is overtaking your world.

Give peace and healing to all those affected and bring comfort to the bereaved that they may feel your arms around them.

Please give the nurses and doctors the strength to carry on caring for the sick and dying.

May we help by doing as requested and staying indoors.

Lord bless every one as we face an uncertain future.

Let us bless our neighbours and give them an inner peace.

Amen

Pray

As we carry on today and tomorrow in a strange new world, let us take the following words from Leonard Nimoy and remember that life will be kind once more.

“Because I have known despair, I value hope. Because I have tasted frustration, I value fulfilment. Because I have been lonely, I value love.”

May you all value the hope, love and fulfilment of our gracious lord over the coming week and forevermore. Amen