### Ezekiel 37:1-14 New International Version (NIV)

37 The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. 3He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I said, “Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”

4Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! 5This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. 6I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’”

7So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

9Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” 10So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

11Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ 12Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.’”

### John 11:1-45 New International Version (NIV)

11 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2(This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) 3So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

4When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” 5Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, 7and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

8“But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”

9Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. 10It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”

11After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

12His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” 13Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

14So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, 15and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

16Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

17On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, 19and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. 20When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

21“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

23Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

24Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

25Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

27“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

28After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” 29When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. 30Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

32When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

33When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34“Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

35Jesus wept.

36Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

37But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

38Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39“Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

40Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

41So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

43When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

45Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

“A Church of Spirit and Bone”

The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee

March 26, 2023

I am grateful to be in conversation with Allan Sandlin, the interim *and* former pastor from St. Francis, about ways our churches will worship and study together this Lent, and I look forward to preaching at St. Francis on the evening of Good Friday. I am writing about forgiveness as I think about some of Jesus’ last words on the cross. Preparing for this had me remember preaching about the woman who forgave those who killed her own family during the genocide in Rwanda in the 90s. Looking into a “where are they now” kind of thing, I have been curious to know whether tensions between peoples have eased, wondering whether there are new conflicts that we haven’t heard about as widely. In these many years since the genocide in Rwanda, there have been keen efforts toward reconciliation between the Hutus and Tutsis. There is nowhere that either group can go, and so unless they find a way to work toward reconciliation, involving forgiveness on one hand and repentance on the other, there will be ongoing enmity. Of course, not everyone who has lost loved ones will be able to move toward forgiveness, and not everyone who was a part of the widespread murders and ravaging of other people *is* sorry for their involvement. *The New York Times Magazine* once carried a photographic essay called “Portraits of Reconciliation,” involving various survivors and perpetrators, along with accompanying text. It was a powerful illustration of the strength of forgiveness to heal long-standing wounds. I’d like to share a bit from this essay with you.

“At the photo shoots, the photographer Pieter Hugo said, the relationships between the victims and the perpetrators varied widely. Some pairs showed up and sat easily together, chatting about village gossip. Others arrived willing to be photographed but unable to go much further.”

One pair that started off with some tension did move toward real healing. I’d like to read with you some of the text by Susan Dominus. The perpetrator, Dominique NDAHIMANA has something to teach us about repentance. “The day I thought of asking pardon, I felt unburdened and relieved. I had lost my humanity because of the crime I committed, but now I am like any human being.”

The survivor, Cansilde MUNGANYINKA, reflected the following: “After I was chased from my village and Dominique and others looted it, I became homeless and insane. Later, when he asked my pardon, I said: ‘I have nothing to feed my children. Are you going to help raise my children? Are you going to build a house for them?’ The next week, Dominique came with some survivors and former prisoners who perpetrated genocide. There were more than 50 of them, and they built my family a house. Ever since then, I have started to feel better. I was like a dry stick; now I feel peaceful in my heart, and I share this peace with my neighbors.”

Ezekiel asks with clear doubts, “Can these bones live?” Evidently, they can.   
"I was like a dry stick; now I feel peaceful in my heart, and I share this peace with my neighbors.”

So often, it is the people who are going through some of the more significant difficulties that life can present who are quick to say that they need only “look around them” to know that despite those challenges, they are doing o.k. Life is still good. Maybe you are one of them. I am sometimes astounded at individual and family resiliency. But maybe you don’t feel like this, and I don’t blame you. Whether it is watching a loved one struggle with addition, or illness, or loneliness, pain or deep sorrow, or whether it is going through any of this yourself, there *are* those moments in life that challenge our ability to quench the dryness. While we may not be Lazarus, already wrapped in the bandages of death or more figurative bandages of confinement, we have all known some of this dryness. Maybe, instead of the circumstances that bind us, it is our reaction to these circumstances that are even more constricting. In this way, maybe we are more like the people of Rwanda than we know.

We swallow our joy when we bask in resentment rather than forgiveness. We squelch our happiness when we offer to others not the sense of belonging, but of exclusion. We suck every ounce of life-giving moisture from our lives when we give in to jealousy and rage rather than cultivating asking of ourselves a deeper love. What are we unwilling to do, and what are we unable to do to move toward reconciliation? We might ask how, in our attempts to be what God would have us be, do we let our flesh and bones get in the way of Spirit?

Today is a day we celebrate the presence of the Spirit in us, and the way in which we *are* enlivened in new ways when we let the Spirit blow through, in and around us. This is the gift of life in Christ. Our establishment is a church of both Spirit and bone. While we may live in our individual bodies, prone to disappointment, to sadness and even, sometimes, treachery, we are also part of the Body of Christ that is the Church. Jesus Christ himself invites us i to this place, and *thank God*, we therefore move beyond what would keep us down.

And when I say the Church, I don’t mean our gathering here, in this place. I mean the worldwide Body of Christ—those who call themselves Christian, walking and talking like it. We need to be a *force* for reconciliation, for forgiveness and shouting glory to God. Jesus knows deception and betrayal, and Jesus knows resurrection. So do those who walked with and loved him—loved his compassionate heart that broke at the suffering of his friends who had lost their brother; that broke at his own losses. They all knew our challenges, lived through them, and made the decision to make the choice for Spirit that gives life to shriveled bone.

And Jesus knew what we are still learning—that with God, all things are possible. The Spirit of God lives in us, and as the Apostle Paul reminds us in the 8th chapter of his letter to the church in Rome, “even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. 11And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.” Let us share this peace with our neighbors. Thanks be to God! Amen.