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Ezekiel 37:1-14; John 11:1-45

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts
be reflections of your word to us today, in Jesus' name we pray.

Amen

Lift voice

So, how are you doing? I've been asking around. "Doing alright, reading books, gardening, washing my hands." "It's strange working from home; my routine is all messed up and the lines are very blurry between work and home." "We're worried about our business." "I'm bored and I'm not able to do my usual routine; I don't like this." "I have COVID-19; I've been pretty sick, but I think I'm getting better." Within us there is always more than one answer to 'how are you.' I wonder about the deeper answer . . . check in with yourself for a minute . . . how are you in your bones?? What is the answer that is underneath your initial response? The answer you have to wait for or breathe into?

I'm pretty exhausted . . . not just because I've never led worship online before and we've had to re-create the way we do congregational life. It's because the world is in turmoil and it

directly impacts my life . . . which is pretty unusual. I watch the news and the state of hospitals in New York and I can dip into grief and a feeling of helplessness as I watch the appeals of nurses and doctors for protective equipment. It seems impossible that the best thing I can do is nothing. It is so counter to my instinct. It's not literally nothing, but of course the argument is that my actions effect the health of my community, so I wash my hands, limit contact and cancel everything in person. Luckily I have a garden to plant.

Given the projection of where this pandemic is supposed to go, today's texts seem a bit early. We are still adjusting, still learning and still full of energy. Does the image of dry bones resonate? There's never a bad time for this image, really – it is such a strong message for any of the many narratives at play in our lives. But in terms of this story currently dominating the world, I wonder how this story will resonate 3 months from now or 6 months? I wonder who we will be at the end of this. Will we feel dry in our bones? Will we find a deeper truth about what it means to be human or a gut check about living sustainably?

Somewhere deep within the mystery, God seems to be doing something with this time. My intuition says the slow work of God is working on the world.

Ezekiel writes this vision of the valley with dry bones in the first 20 years of the Babylonian exile . . . he receives this vision, but it will be another 30 years before the Israelites know the fullness of this promise. The slow work of God . . .

When Mary and Martha lose their brother, Jesus takes his time to get there. The narrative is rich with “what if’s,” with grief, with images of the community gathered. Jesus also notices; he is moved by their grief. Even as a healer, who sees life and death differently, he is moved to tears along with the community. The promise of new life doesn’t wipe out the grief, rather it comes along side it . . . the promise of new life is present in the days of waiting and wailing. And when the time is right, new life indeed comes. The resurrection is admittedly an important example of this truth, but it is not the only one, and not the only one in scripture. Lazarus . . . on the 4th day, when even the pungent smell of death fills the air around the tomb, Jesus calls him to come out.

Jesus gives thanks for God the Father hearing him, giving an indication that Jesus previously prayed for this healing . . . or that Jesus has been praying for a period of time . . . it indicates that God has been working on this miracle in the intervening time.

Returning again to Ezekiel, who sees a vision of dry bones, but at the word of life, those bones come together with flesh and breath, out of their graves, to the life for which they have been praying for 2 generations. Life out of death, given through a promise . . . even though the fruit of that promise takes time.

This season of waiting and longing is the most important time to remember the promise of new life, because waiting without an end in sight is really hard. It’s day by day, it’s phone call by phone call. And we don’t know how long it will last. We don’t know who we will be at the end of it. But I proclaim these two things: God is at work in the world right now. The mystery of God is beyond me, but my intuition tells me God is at work, even in the midst of the chaos and feelings of helplessness and grief. The second thing is we will be different when this is over. Surely as the

Israelites were changed by exile and those who witnessed the raising of Lazarus, we will be changed . . . we should be changed by this season, as we slow down, as we reflect . . . with God at our side. Thanks be to God.