

**Hybrid Worship for March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023**  
**Fifth Sunday of Lent**

**Territorial Acknowledgment and Announcements**

We acknowledge that the land on which we gather is situated upon traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron - Wyandot, the Haudenosaunee and later the Mississauga of the Credit First Nations. The territory is mutually covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibway and other allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Today, this remains the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in their community, and to share and respect Mother Earth.

**Centering Music:** “Lord Prepare Me” MV 18

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary,  
pure and holy tried and true;  
with thanksgiving, I’ll be a living  
sanctuary for you.

**Call to Worship and Opening Prayer**

One: Each day brings us closer to the cross on our Lenten journey.

**All: We continue to walk together, sharing our joys,  
leaning on one another in our sorrows,  
and always looking forward – even when looking toward Holy Week is painful.**

One: Each day brings us closer to Easter’s dawn of joy.

**All: We continue to step together, hopeful and expectant,  
growing together as God’s beloved community.**

One: This day we gather to worship,

**All: We pause our Lenten sojourning to pray,  
to praise, to be God’s flesh and bone presence in this place or in our homes.**

One: This day we pray together:

**All: Enlivening God,  
you bring life to dry bones and weary hearts.  
You restore us and re-create us.  
Hold us and mold us, God,  
so that we can face the continuing journey to the cross.  
We pray in the name of the One who has walked that path,  
and whose story we hold dear, Jesus the Christ. Amen**

**Opening Hymn:** “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” VU 326

O for a thousand tongues to sing  
my great Redeemer’s praise,

the glories of my God and King,  
the triumphs of God's grace.

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,  
that bids our sorrows cease;  
'tis music in the sinner's ears,  
'tis life and health and peace.

He speaks, and listening to his voice,  
new life the dead receive,  
the mournful broken-hearts rejoice,  
the humble poor believe.

Hear him, you deaf; you voiceless ones,  
your tongues again employ;  
you blind, behold your Saviour comes,  
and leap, you lame, for joy!

My gracious Master and my God,  
assist me to proclaim,  
to spread through all the earth abroad  
the honours of your name.

**Prayer for Reflection and Revelation:** *Rev. M Jade Kaiser, enfleshed.com*

Tender One,  
You hold all the world's grief close.  
With every word that cuts,  
every policy that demeans,  
every act of violence or corruption,  
You draw near to the ones who ache.  
You comfort the broken hearted  
and shore up beside the afflicted.

We know it's not enough only to weep,  
but your compassion reminds us  
we cannot mend the world  
without bearing witness to its sorrow.

Keep us from despair that overcomes,  
but never let us become strangers to the world's ache –  
turning away from the pain of our neighbor,  
or growing accustomed to violence that shouldn't be.

Whatever evil may befall us,  
whatever destruction we may witness,  
may we never grow cold to Love  
or be convinced of the inevitability of cruelty.

Jesus, ever-present to the pain around him,  
did not escape into the safety of indifference –  
even in the shadow of the cross.

His care for the suffering  
and his confidence in your liberating ways,  
made him kind,  
softened him to even the hardest hearts,  
and kindled in him Your love for humanity.

Love that appears foolish.  
Love that resists evil.  
Love that makes way for the Kingdom.

Make it so among us, O God,  
and lead us in the ways of compassion.

**Sung Response:** “And When You Call for Me” MV 96

And when you call for me,  
I have already answered.  
And when you call for me,  
I am already there.

**Scripture Readings:**

Ezekiel 37:1–14

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. He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, ‘Mortal, can these bones live?’ I answered, ‘O Lord God, you know.’ Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 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.’

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. 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. 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.’ I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

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.” 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. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 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.’

John 11:1–45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, ‘Lord, he whom you love is ill.’ But when Jesus heard it, he said, ‘This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.’ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judea again.’ The disciples said to him, ‘Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?’ Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.’ After saying this, he told them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.’ The disciples said to him, ‘Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.’ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.’ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.’ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, ‘The Teacher is here and is calling for you.’ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

**Choir:** "Kyrie"

**Reflection:** Flesh and Bones

**Hymn:** "In the Bulb There is a Flower" VU 703

In the bulb there is a flower;  
in the seed, an apple tree;  
in cocoons, a hidden promise:  
butterflies will soon be free!  
In the cold and snow of winter  
there's a spring that waits to be,  
unrevealed until its season,  
something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence,  
seeking word and melody;  
there's a dawn in every darkness,  
bringing hope to you and me.  
From the past will come the future;  
what it holds, a mystery,  
unrevealed until its season,  
something God alone can see.

In our end is our beginning;

in our time, infinity;  
in our doubt there is believing;  
in our life, eternity.  
In our death, a resurrection;  
at the last, a victory,  
unrevealed until its season,  
something God alone can see.

### **Introduction to the Offering**

#### **Gift of Music**

**Hymn of Dedication:** “Grant us, God, the Grace” VU 540  
Grant us, God, the grace of giving,  
with a spirit large and free,  
that ourselves and all our living  
we may offer faithfully.

#### **Offering Prayer:**

**All: Accept all that we offer, God, in all the ways it is offered.  
May what we contribute bring hope to the weary,  
put flesh on good ideas,  
and build strong bones of community.  
Amen**

#### **Prayers of the People** *from ‘Prayers for All Seasons’ Year A- adapted*

Life-giving God,  
like Martha, Mary and Lazarus we are loved by you.  
We think of this family, and the way they opened their home and lives to others,  
providing care and companionship to Jesus and his friends.  
We pray for our homes,  
that they may be places where others can find life-giving relationships.

#### *the singing bowl rings*

Also like Martha, Mary and Lazarus, we are different from one another.  
Martha was practical and clear about what she believed.  
Thank you, God, for those who use their skills and abilities to care for others.  
We pray that their faithfulness and dependability will bring hope  
to those who are not sure of their faith and  
find it hard to believe in you and in other people.

*the singing bowl rings*

Mary loved deeply and knew the pain of loss and desertion.  
We pray for those who have experienced the loss of those they love,  
those for who, relationships have brought disappointment,  
those whose trust has not been honoured.  
May they find – through your Spirit – comfort in their sadness  
and courage to reach out again to others.

*the singing bowl rings*

Lazarus faced illness and death.  
We pray for all who face life-threatening illness or injuries,  
those paralyzed by fear or anxiety,  
and those for whom depression or difficulties make life painful  
or seem not worth living.  
Help us to face our mortality,  
knowing there are limits to our energy  
and there will be an end to our life and strength,  
but never an end to your loving presence.

*the singing bowl rings*

In silence we bring our own prayers to you, God.

*the singing bowl rings*

**The Lord's Prayer (sung) VU 959**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil  
for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,  
now and forever.

**Closing Hymn:** "Spirit of Gentleness" VU 375  
Spirit, Spirit of gentleness,

blow thro' the wilderness calling and free,  
Spirit, Spirit of restlessness,  
stir me from placidness,  
Wind, Wind on the sea.

You moved on the waters, you called to the deep,  
then you coaxed up the mountains from the  
valleys of sleep;  
and over the eons you called to each thing:  
wake from your slumbers and rise on your wings.  
Spirit, Spirit of gentleness,  
blow thro' the wilderness calling and free,  
Spirit, Spirit of restlessness,  
stir me from placidness,  
Wind, Wind on the sea.

You swept thro' the desert, you stung with the sand,  
and you goaded your people with a law and a land;  
and when they were blinded with their idols and lies,  
then you spoke thro' your prophets to open their eyes.

Spirit, Spirit of gentleness,  
blow thro' the wilderness calling and free,  
Spirit, Spirit of restlessness,  
stir me from placidness,  
Wind, Wind on the sea.

You sang in a stable, you cried from a hill,  
then you whispered in silence when the whole world  
was still;  
and down in the city you called once again,  
when you blew through your people on the rush  
of the wind.

Spirit, Spirit of gentleness,  
blow thro' the wilderness calling and free,  
Spirit, Spirit of restlessness,  
stir me from placidness,  
Wind, Wind on the sea.

You call from tomorrow, you break ancient schemes,  
from the bondage of sorrow the captives dream dreams,

our women see visions, our men clear their eyes,  
with bold new decisions your people arise.

Spirit, Spirit of gentleness,  
blow thro' the wilderness calling and free,  
Spirit, Spirit of restlessness,  
stir me from placidness,  
Wind, Wind on the sea.

### **Commissioning /Blessing**

**Sung Amen**    VU 972

Rev. Joanne's Reflection

"O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord."

Can we imagine the scene that Ezekiel paints for us? The valley – likely signifying a battleground – filled with bones that begin to rattle as Ezekiel speaks to them. The rattling continues as bone meets bone, coming together as in that old spiritual – “the toe bones connected to the foot bone, the foot bones connected to the heel bone, the heel bones connected to the ankle bone, now hear the word of the Lord.” The sound changes as sinews and flesh begin to appear, sliding over skulls and leg bones, creating the form of people, not yet alive because there is no breath – no Spirit – in them. Ezekiel is commanded to speak again, to prophecy to the breath, the Spirit, and the now en fleshed skeletons come alive, representing the people of Israel brought back to life and wholeness so that they may know God.

Can we imagine that scene in Bethany that the writer of John's gospel paints for us? A community that is mourning the loss of one of their own, sisters weeping, and Jesus weeping, too. The anguish that must have hung in the air like a cloud, the grief shared by many. The approach to that closed tomb, a symbol of the finality of death and our separation from the ones we love. Cheeks wet with tears of mourning, and perhaps of frustration that Jesus had not arrived sooner to save Lazarus. The shocking command to roll the stone away and open the tomb, even though the stench of death – the real and natural process of a body breaking down – bones disconnecting, flesh and sinews dissolving, had already begun. And then the amazing command after Jesus' prayer to God – “Lazarus, come out!” and the more amazing appearance of Lazarus himself, whole and restored.

In raising Lazarus, Jesus did what God had through Ezekiel – restored living flesh to the bones of the people, bringing hope and pointing to God's power and faithfulness. In Jesus' time, it was believed that the spirit lingered near the body after death for about three days before journeying on, but even that time has passed. Like the dry bones of Ezekiel, there is no time limit for God to bring new life, to reinvigorate and make new.

Flesh and bone and the breath of the Spirit, that is how we have been crafted by God. We have been created to live out a holy life in our flesh and bones, declaring God's kingdom, declaring our relationship to all creation and to one another, and meant to live fully in our very corporeal state. There may be times when our 'bones' become dry, when we, like Mary and Martha, face loss and disappointment, and we need to hear those words - “O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.” There may be times when we are discouraged, or feel disconnected, and 'dry' in our spirits, and we need to feel God pulling us back

together. There may even be times when we feel that death is looming – the death of our communities of faith, or even our own faith, the loss of our youthful years or even the loss of younger ones in our churches. We need to hear God in Christ calling us to ‘come out’ to become ‘unbound,’ to re-enter life to the fullest.

We might ask, what are WE being called to bring to life? What are we being asked to put life – flesh and bones – into? Perhaps there are new connections we can make as a community of faith, both to support one another, but also to remind those around us that God makes a difference in our lives. Perhaps there are initiatives like our new pantry and Benevolent Fund that need our action and attention to be brought to life. We might have to take some risks, as Jesus did when he delayed his return to Bethany, and even when he raised Lazarus knowing that he was under the scrutiny of both religious and civil leaders. Take risks knowing that God is with us, and that with God we can accomplish the remarkable.

We might also ask what we are being called to ‘unbind’ and ‘set free’. What lies deep in our hearts that needs to be expressed in our faith journeys together? Do we yearn for more connections to social justice? Do we need more ways to connect to God? Do we need to set free attitudes or perspectives that have kept us from knowing God’s new life? I remember a story of a woman who, as part of a study group at her church, expressed her life-long but never expressed desire to preach a sermon. With the support and encouragement of her community, she not only preached her first sermon but went on to study and became a Licensed Lay Worship Leader. She became ‘unbound.’

“O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.”

Hear the word of God, and live. Hear the Living Word and be inspired. In our dryness, God brings new life. In the many ways that we close ourselves off to one another, Jesus calls us out to new life, to be free from what restricts us, to join the weeping and the celebrating in our flesh and bone state.

For this is how God has made us – flesh and bones and the breath of the Spirit – full of the potential for new life, and for justice-bringing, and for hope. Thanks be to God.

Amen