

Living

NRS Ezekiel 37:1 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."

NRS John 11:1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 3 So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." 4 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." 5 Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6 after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9 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. 10 But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." 11 After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." 12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." 13 Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14 Then

Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16 Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." 17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." 28 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." 29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 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. 32 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." 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 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 four days." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42 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." 43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 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." 45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Loving Creator shine as a light before me that you may be seen and not I. Give me words that I may speak give us ears that we may hear and through your Holy Spirit help us understand.
Amen.

Ezekiel was a strange dude. He had some crazy visions. He sees wheels in wheels, he sees creatures of the strangest sort. And he sees a valley filled with bones.

Ezekiel was strange, but he had some good reasons. In Ezekiel's time things were not going so well. The economy was bad, oil prices were up, inflation was high and there were no good jobs. There were wars that spread disease and poverty. Political parties were infighting. Oh no, wait, that is our time.

I guess some of those applied in Ezekiel's time too, but they had it even worse.

These people were hauled off to another land as captives. Like Israel, the northern kingdom which was conquered 200 years earlier, Judah was conquered. Once Judah fell, the captives were taken to Babylon. They were just a shadow of their former selves. They were taken from their homes and land and they were pressed into service.

They were distressed.

One of the songs that was written during this time is Psalm 137:

By the **rivers of Babylon**-- there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How could we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?

This lament shows the despair of a people cut off from all that made them God's people. They had nothing left. They were spent. They were like dry bones, the remains of a once living body.

The body needs water to live. It is a universal truth that humans share, we need water to live. Get too dry and you die. These people had been cut off from the waters that kept them alive, they were too dry.

As a former nurse, I am always pushing fluids. We would go around in the nursing homes and push the fluids on people.

In my work with hospice I saw some amazing things.

There was one patient I was sent to see. Al had terminal cancer.

The nurse said he was very close to the end. She thought I would go out to make him comfortable for the end.

When I arrived for my visit, I would have agreed with the nurse's assessment. Ashen skin, shallow respirations, very little response, Al was very close to death.

I began my job of making sure he was clean and comfortable. Even when people are near death the gentle massage of a bed bath will calm and settle a person. The smallest comfort is multiplied.

As I was wiping his face he tried to get at the washcloth with his mouth. I tried putting some water on his lips and he eagerly licked it off, and then more and more. I gave him a straw and he took a few weak sips of water. I continued working with him, remaking the bed, and changing the linens, but every so often I would offer him a few sips of water which he took with ever growing vigor.

I spent some time with his family as I got finished. His children were just gathering together and had arrived to find dad at death's door. This was a deep sadness for them because there were some unresolved issues, and with Al's death, they would be left unresolved.

As we talked, I would return to offer Al water. He eventually finished a small glass of water, and at the end of an hour, to everyone's amazement, Ed opened his eyes.

We readjusted him so he could see his family; he took more water, and then Al began to speak. Six ounces of water and a man who was nearly dead was brought back to life.

Israel was nearly dead, and Ezekiel has a vision of a valley full of dry bones. They are scattered around and have no life. This is Israel.

Ezekiel is commanded:

Then he said to me, "Prophecy 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.

Dem bones dem bones dem dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

God has a word for the dry bones.

My breath will enter you and you shall live.

God has a Word for the dry bones.

My breath will enter you. My breath, God says will make you live again.

Breath, this word in Hebrew is Ruah. It first appears in the second verse of Genesis, "and the Spirit of God was over the waters." Ruah is the breath of God, the Spirit. This is what breathed life into creation. This is what we need to live.

Israel could live again if they allowed God's breath to breathe into them.

God has a Word for the dry bones.

And the bones obey and bone to bone, and sinew to sinew, flesh and skin and breath and life.

Israel could find new life, could receive the breath of God, and live again.

Israel had been through some ups and downs. They had gone through many dry times and they had come out of it before. Even though hope seemed beyond reach, God says to Ezekiel, it is not too late; tell my people it is not too late.

This is clearly a resurrection story, and that is why it is paired in the lectionary with the raising of Lazarus.

Lazarus was Jesus' friend. This is the person he ate with and stayed with.

Lazarus was ill and Mary and Martha sent word, come, for your good friend is sick. And then the scripture makes a point of saying that he dilly dallied around for a few days before getting on the road and arrives way too late; Lazarus is dead and buried.

Dead is pretty clear, no more life in the bones.

Lazarus was just the beginnings of a pile of dry bones.

While there was no life in his bones, God had a word for those bones.

Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"
There is a word for the bones, come on out here.

I always wondered if I should try that. Usually when I get a call to do a funeral I don't begin by standing outside of Lombard's and calling for the person to come out. I feel like this would be distressing for everyone involved.

But, as with the dry bones in the valley, this call is not just any call, but it is a call from God.

Lazarus does not just respond to any call, he responds to the voice of the master, he comes out because he is called by the Word of God. The breath of God entered him and he walked out, still bound in the garments of death, but now alive.

Dry bones are never too dry for the one who give us living water.

The living water offered by Jesus Christ, the breath of God in the Holy Spirit these are the same thing. This is the source of all life and existence.

It is odd that we use water and breath as images of the same thing. Our religious language can never contain what God is, but these images can help us wrap our head around the utter mystery of God, but I digress.

And so I wonder, is there anything too dried out for God?

Can God breathe new life into the parched places of our world?

Jesus found people who were spiritually dead gave them a drink.
Jesus offered a breath of fresh air to people who were suffocating.

He reached out to the undesirables, the ones who were the driest, the tax collectors, the poor, the widow, the orphan, the outcast, the prisoner.

There was no limit, no barrier to God's love.
Nothing is too dry for God's healing love.

Jesus calls out with authority , O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD, and Lazarus gets up and walks out of the tomb.

Israel was brought back to life. Just a few years after Ezekiel has the vision of the dry bones coming back to life, the Babylonians were overthrown by the Persians, and the children of Israel were sent home. Ezekiel's vision was true, Israel was to live again at the word of the Lord.

My patient Al was brought back to life. He needed a little water to bring him back.

Despite the appearances Al did not die that day. For the next 10 days Al was able to spend time with his family, he was able to mend fences and restore his relationships. Eventually the cancer began to sap his strength, and with his family around him, Al breathed his last, but not before he had the chance to find the healing he needed.

We all have a chance for redemption and restoration. We are always invited to come to Jesus who tells the woman at the well: "whoever drinks of the water that I will give you shall never thirst; but the water that I will give you will become in you a well of water springing up to eternal life."

We should also remember that as he hung on his cross, he said "I thirst"

Jesus knew what it was to be dry, to feel the weight of life and mortality. He thirsted as life drained from his body.

God joined our existence in order to live as a human and to die as a human in order to share our joys and our pains.

Jesus thirsted, but the story does not end there. Jesus found the spring of life eternal. This water wells up within us and nourishes us.

When we are spiritually dry we can call to Jesus.

When we are physically weak, we can find strength.

When we are meet challenges and can't see a way around them, Jesus is there to say come out into the light.

I invite you to stop and look at the St. John's Bible here. The illumination is of the raising of Lazarus. Donald Jackson envisioned this scene from the perspective of Lazarus. Lazarus is in the darkness of the tomb and he is looking out into the blinding light of Christ. Jackson wondered what it would be like to reenter the world of light and life.

The Word of God is calling to you, come out and breathe deeply.
Come out and drink the living waters.

We are never too dry to be restored by the Spirit, the breath, the mighty wind of God.

Thanks be to God.
AMEN.