

**Presider's Notes for March 29, 2020, St. Albert United Church
Fifth Sunday in Lent. Prepared by Holly Parker.**

COMMUNITY WELCOME

Tawow, Bienvenue, Welcome to St. Albert United Church. We offer a special welcome to any newcomers or visitors who join us this morning. As we come together, we acknowledge that we do so in the traditional lands of Treaty 6 First Nations and at a significant trading community of the Metis Nation. We also affirm all are welcome to share fully in our life and work regardless of age, race, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, belief, economic circumstance, ability, or background.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Suspended between life and death, between beginnings and endings is the mystery of the unknowing...

On our Lenten journey, we ask ourselves and we companion those who ask in every age: "Can these bones live?"

Whispered on the wind, borne on the Spirit's breath comes the question: Can these bones live?

Entering into the mystery of unknowing, let us worship together.

(Written by Juanita Austin, Salmon Arm, BC. Gathering Lent/Easter 2020, page 33. Used with permission.)

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious, Living God, there are times when we feel dry and empty, like the dry bones Ezekiel saw in the valley. Breathe upon us, O God, and revitalize us, reanimate us, reawaken us, rekindle in us the fire of your Spirit, that we may share fully in the grace and life you give. Amen.

(Written by George Allan, Chatham, ON. Gathering Lent/Easter 2020, page 34. Used with permission.)

HYMN: “Breathe on Me, Breath of God” VU #382
Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, until my heart is pure,
until my will is one with thine, to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, till I am wholly thine,
until this earthly part of me glows with thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, so shall I never die,
but live with thee the perfect life of thine eternity.

TIME FOR ALL AGES

[Story idea done by Rev. Blaine Gregg at Spirit of Hope United Church, March 15, 2020. Thank you to my friend, Vici, for sharing.]

Required: bowl of water, soap, hand towel

I am at the front of the church with the children. I ask the children to tell me the name of their favourite hymns. If one of them says, “Jesus Loves Me, VU 365,” I then sing a verse and a chorus of “Jesus Loves Me” while using soap and water to wash my hands *while* I am singing, not rinsing my hands until I have finished singing. If another child says “Like a Rock, MV 92,” I then sing “Like a Rock” twice through while using the soap and water to wash my hands *while* I am singing, not rinsing my hands until I have finished singing. I explain to the children: “It takes at least 20 seconds to sing through the verse and chorus of the hymn. During this coronavirus situation, we are all told to wash our hands regularly and often for at least 20 seconds. To help you make sure you wash your hands for long enough, sing a verse and chorus of your favourite hymn while you are washing your hands.”

[Some hymn suggestions from an informal survey:
Peace Like a River; Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah; On Eagle's Wings; A Light
Is Gleaming; Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You; Go Gently, Go Lightly; Shelter;
All Things Bright and Beautiful; Hosanna, Loud Hosanna; It Only Takes a Spark;
Tell Me the Stories of Jesus; Draw the Circle Wide; The Church Is Wherever
God's People; Dance with the Spirit.]

HYMN "There'll Be Sunshine in the Morning"

**There'll be sunshine in the mornin',
There'll be sunshine in the morning,
There'll be sunshine in the mornin',
Sunshine in the mornin', one of these days.**

**Freedom will come to all our brothers,
Freedom will come to all our sisters,
Freedom will come to all our children,
Freedom to all our children, one of these days.**

**Justice will flow like a mighty river,
Justice will flow like a mighty river,
Justice will flow like a mighty river,
Justice like a river, one of these days.**

**Love shall live in every heart,
Love shall live in every heart,
Love shall live in every heart,
Love in every heart, one of these days.**

**Peace shall come to every nation,
Peace shall come to every nation,
Peace shall come to every nation,
Peace to every nation, one of these days.**

**There'll be sunshine in the mornin',
There'll be sunshine in the morning,
There'll be sunshine in the mornin',**

Sunshine in the mornin' one of these days.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Reviving Spirit, we cry out to you:

“Our bones are dried up.”

But we mean:

“Our souls are hungry, and all we have purchased cannot give them strength to live.”

We cry to you:

“Our hope is lost.”

But we mean:

“We are afraid. If we work to change the world, what will we lose?”

We cry to you:

“We are cut off completely.”

But we mean:

“We are selfish. We resist connection because it may cost us our comfort.”

But you, O Wind of God, have been promised to us. The prophets have spoken truth, and through this truth, we know you, O God.

Breath of Life, tear us from our graves. Clothe our fearful bones and fill us with the wonder of your love and compassion, until we dance the dance of truth, of justice, of peace, and of joy. Spirit, live within us, as we dance the kingdom into being. Amen.

(Written by Anna Atkinson, Cedar U.C., Nanaimo, BC. Gathering Lent/Easter 2020, page 35. Used with permission.)

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

The Good News of the gospel is this: Our God is loving and life giving. Always, Always, ALWAYS. May our God give us hope and strength to be the people we were created to be. Amen.

(Written by Beth W Johnston, Hantsport P.C., Hantsport, NS. Gathering Lent/Easter 2020, page 36. Used with permission.)

READINGS

Ezekiel 37:1–14 [New International Version]

The Valley of Dry Bones

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. He 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. He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

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

Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I 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.’”

So 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. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, 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.’” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

Then 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.’ Therefore prophecy 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. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I 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.””

One: Herein we seek wisdom. **All: Thanks be to God.**

John 11:1–45 [New International Version]

The Death of Lazarus

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (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.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

When 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.” Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

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

Jesus 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. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”

After 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.”

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

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

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

Jesus Comforts the Sisters of Lazarus

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

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

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

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

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

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

After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” When Mary

heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When 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.

When 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.”

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

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

Jesus wept.

Then 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?”

Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. “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.”

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

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I 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.”

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The 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.”

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

One: Herein we seek wisdom. **All: Thanks be to God.**

Non-Biblical reading from *The Little Book of WISDOM*, compiled and illustrated by Richard Torregrossa:

People love to talk but hate to listen. Listening is not merely not talking, though even that is beyond most of our powers; it means taking a vigorous, human interest in what is being told us. You can listen like a blank wall or like a splendid auditorium where every sound comes back fuller and richer. —Alice Duer Miller

One: Herein we seek wisdom. **All: Thanks be to God.**

SILENT REFLECTION: We reflect together on all we have heard.

MESSAGE: “Listening for God’s Call in Uncertain Times”

Rev. Deborah Hoekstra

(online video message, check website for link)

HYMN: “Spirit God, Be Our Breath” MV #150

Spirit God: be our breath, be our song. Blow through us, bringing strength to move on. Our world seems inward, defensive, withdrawn... Spirit God, be our song.

Patient God: soothe our pride, calm our fear. Comfort us. When we know you are near we grow more certain, our vision is clear. Patient God, calm our fear.

Loving God: be our voice, be our prayer. Reaching out, joining hands as we share, we seek your guidance through friendship and care. Loving God, be our prayer.

Spirit God: be our breath, be our song. Blow through us, bringing strength to move on. Through change, through challenge, we’ll greet the new dawn... Spirit God, be our song.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

(Adapted from a prayer written by Wanda Burse, Rural United P.C., Thamesville, ON. Gathering Lent/Easter 2020, page 76. Used with permission.)

Eternal Spirit, Breath of Our Breath, Spirit of Our Spirit, blanketing the earth with a light covering of snow ... hinting at the growth to come; nourishing the soils with snow melt ... reaching to the roots of existence; brightly shining sun ... warming the earth and all that is. Your Spirit’s movement was and is and always will be pulsing through creation, nourishing and nurturing, birthing and enlivening, prodding and supporting.

We give thanks for the blessing of each day ... time and extra time to spend with family and friends via emails, Facebook, phone calls, Facetime, and even ‘snail’ mail, a variety of foods to nourish our bodies, fresh air to breathe, clean water in abundance, homes that are warm and

safe, and the sounds of peace surrounding us. As we dwell with these blessings, keep us ever mindful that not all people know these blessings. Let us remember those who are sick, in quarantine, in self-isolation, laid off from work, having to work from home, having to do online classes while schools are closed, mourning the loss of a loved one, providing care at home or at hospital, and taking care of essential services.

Stir in us the desire to be voices of justice, peace, and reconciliation within our community, our country, and beyond our borders. We pray for, yearn for, and work for justice, peace, and reconciliation. As we serve, being the hands and feet of Christ in the world, make us aware of your presence with us and within us, hastening the work that needs to be done. We join together in the prayer you taught us...

JESUS PRAYER:

A paraphrase based on the Aramaic language Jesus would have originally spoken:

Radiant One: your Name shines within us, outside us—even darkness shines in you. Create your reign now, that your one desire acts with ours, as in all light so in all things. Grant what we need each day in bread and insight. Forgive our hidden past, our secret shames, as we forgive what others hide. Keep us from forgetfulness, the temptation of false appearances and free us to walk your path with light and joy. For from you arises every vision; to you returns the birthing glory and light of the cosmos. Amen.

SHARING OF THE GIFTS FOR THE WORK OF THE CHURCH:

Ezekiel saw a vision of new life transforming death. Take these gifts, O God—bits of lifeless metal and dead paper—and transform them for your life-giving work in the world. Bless us with the same kind of transformation, that we may become your hands and feet for new life in this world. Amen.

(Written by Gord Dunbar, Kincardine P.C., Kincardine ON. Gathering Lent/Easter 2020, page 37. Used with permission.)

SHARING OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE IN GOD’S WORK

Reach out in a variety of ways to your family, friends, and fellow congregation members—connect with and support each other.

Please check the church website for updates and information.
(www.stalbertunited.ca)

SENDING HYMN:

“Behold, Behold, I Make All Things New” MV #115

**Behold, behold, I make all things new,
beginning with you and starting from today.
Behold, behold, I make all things new,
my promise is true, for I am Christ the way.** (twice through)

EXTINGUISHING OF TENEBRAE CANDLE

Introduction: Tenebrae, Latin for shadows, is a service where light fades into darkness. Dating back to the eighth century, its diminishing light symbolizes the declining loyalty of Jesus’ disciples and the waning of the light as Jesus departs from the world. In one sense it is the reversal of the Advent wreath, when a candle is lit each week and the light grows in anticipation of the light, Jesus Christ, being born at Christmas. Starting Lent with the brightness of the Christ Candle and six candles representing each of the Sundays of the Lenten Season, the darkness grows as a candle is extinguished each week in anticipation of Jesus dying on the cross on Good Friday, when the Christ Candle is snuffed out.

Meditation:

(Mentally, place yourself inside St. Albert United Church.) When we arrived this morning, we entered into the normal bustles of a church on a Sunday morning: friends greeting each other, choir members getting into their robes, children bringing their energy and enthusiasm. Now that we are sitting together in the pews, I invite you to close your eyes ... and consider the word, “sanctuary.” A sanctuary is a place set aside for sacred things. It is a place of refuge and protection. This room is a sanctuary. The season of Lent is a kind of sanctuary, extended in time.

And one of the things Lent teaches is that you, too, are a sanctuary.
There is inside you a place for sacred things, a place where God abides.

(Silent time.)

As we extinguish this light, we acknowledge the darkness and pain of
war and oppression in the world.

(A candle is extinguished.)

Let us pray:

**Loving God, we open our hearts to you. We invite you into our
innermost being, only to find you already there. Strengthen us in
our quiet places and then lead us into the work of justice and peace.
Amen.**

BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH

May the power of the Spirit to revolutionize and transform the world
be with us this week.

May the power of the Spirit to change lives and directions
work through us this week.

May the power of the Spirit to love
open our hearts to love this week.

When we leave this place, may we see the face of Christ in everyone we
meet,

and may everyone we meet see the face of Christ in us. Amen.