

Holy Conversations  
Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; John 11:1-45 (Yr A)  
Lent V March 29, 2020

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If ever there was a time for conversing with others...

So, how are you this 2<sup>nd</sup> week of social quarantining? I hope you're each staying in touch with the outside world through one-on-one conversations! And, with this extra time on your hands, I pray you're having long walks and talks with God (♪♪ *"and He walks with me and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own. And the joy we share as we tarry there no other has ever known"*) as you read and reflect using scripture as your guide.

Speaking of scripture, did you notice the long readings above? Some of you experienced a similarly long text a few weeks ago (even though it feels like months to me) when we read short sections, then stopped to study and discuss them briefly. I have a suggestion that fits perfectly in these troubling times for the reading and reflecting of John 11:1-45. It's in a separate document, "Prayerful reading of John 11:1-45." I took this from *Seasons of the Spirit*, with their permission. I encourage you to take time to read it prayerfully

The story of raising Lazarus is both familiar and filled with surprises, as we often see in important stories. The disciple to volunteer himself and the others to go back to Judea, where Jesus' life had been threatened? Peter? Good guess, but no, it's Thomas - the same Thomas who wouldn't believe Jesus was alive until he saw and touched Him! And notice that Lazarus is only free when the community unbinds him. We need each other.

I appreciate news stations taking time to share uplifting stories of people helping people. Which is your favorite example of people helping people?

Look at other holy conversations in the gospel reading: Jesus and the disciples; Martha with Jesus, then Mary with Jesus; Jesus praying to God; Jesus to Lazarus; Jesus to the crowd. Some conversations were informational, and others more emotional, and we have the same. I find it helpful to hear Martha and Mary share their frustration with Jesus, especially when I've just shared a burst of frustration in one word. Jesus. What holy conversations did you enjoy last week? Let's **pause** while you remember...

When God speaks, people listen (hopefully!). We listen even if we don't understand. We hear even when we don't like what we're hearing. And when we doubt – well that's when we re-interpret what we think we wanted to hear.

Holy conversations can create anxiety, because of the possible outcomes, the difficulty of asking help for others or self, but repetition helps. Imagine you're Lazarus, and hear Jesus call you back to life. Imagine you're in the crowd and Jesus calls you to unbind Lazarus and set him free.

Or, you might be the writer of Psalm 130 screaming out your truth to God, "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice!" Listen to me, God!

Scriptures remind us that when God speaks it is to set people free; through forgiveness; within God's steadfast love; through amazing and awesome grace. God speaks and light is restored. God speaks and dead, dry bones are reunited and reenergized. When you listen for God's voice speaking into your life, what is it you most long to hear?

**Take time** to think that over.

Let's look into another well-known story: Ezekiel and the valley of dry bones. Ezekiel calls the entire bone pile back to life, but only after asking God for the correct words. It helps to always go directly to the Source of all that is good.

The prophet can put the bones back together, but only the Spirit can provide the holy breath. Words have the power to not only bring people back to life but also to bring them back together as one people.

Speaking of words, let's take a moment to review the Hebrew word *ruah*, used 10 times in Ezekiel 37:1-14. It translates as either breath, wind, or spirit. *Ruah* is the part of God that moves, that is alive without seeing it, the part of God that is sent forth from God. It is the part of God that animates the bones.

This passage has a constant interplay of *ruah*'s possible translations. It was by the *rah* (spirit) of God that Ezekiel came to the valley. At God's direction, he prophesied that *ruah* (breath) would enter the bones. Ezekiel called the breath from the four *ruah* (winds).

What an interesting holy conversation! Much of the action is done by Ezekiel, but God is clearly the main player. The prophet spoke the words by which the bones animated and came together, but it was God's breath that breathed them back to life. When God speaks it is to set people free.

May this week be filled with multiple opportunities for multiple holy conversations with God and people. God speaks. Be sure to take time to listen. God bless you.

Pastor MaryLou