



By the waters of Babylon...

A common liturgy during a time of physical separation

March 29, 2020 – Lent 5

Call to Worship

Can these bones live? Only God knows.
Bring your bones, your dry bones to hear the prophecy of Ezekiel.
Know that God is God.
Know that God's spirit is within you and live!
Let us worship the living God!

Confession

Good and gracious God, the world around us is in chaos.
Forgive us for our limited concerns.
Expand our hearts so that we might care for those beyond our sight and knowledge.
Help us to understand in new ways our interconnectedness.
Forgive our selfish behavior as we hoard our love for one another.
Remind us of your grace.
(silent prayer)

Assurance of Pardon

Nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Nothing. Not a virus. Not even ourselves.
Friends, believe the good news of the Gospel, in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Prayer for Illumination

Open our eyes that we may see, glimpses of your truth. Illumine us.



Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-14 (the Message)

God grabbed me. God's Spirit took me up and set me down in the middle of an open plain strewn with bones. He led me around and among them—a lot of bones! There were bones all over the plain—dry bones, bleached by the sun.

He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "Master God, only you know that."

He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones: 'Dry bones, listen to the Message of God!'" God, the Master, told the dry bones, "Watch this: I'm bringing the breath of life to you and you'll come to life. I'll attach sinews to you, put meat on your bones, cover you with skin, and breathe life into you. You'll come alive and you'll realize that I am God!"

I prophesied just as I'd been commanded. As I prophesied, there was a sound and, oh, rustling! The bones moved and came together, bone to bone. I kept watching. Sinews formed, then muscles on the bones, then skin stretched over them. But they had no breath in them.

He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath. Prophesy, son of man. Tell the breath, 'God, the Master, says, Come from the four winds. Come, breath. Breathe on these slain bodies. Breathe life!'"

So I prophesied, just as he commanded me. The breath entered them and they came alive! They stood up on their feet, a huge army.

Then God said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Listen to what they're saying: 'Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone, there's nothing left of us.'

"Therefore, prophesy. Tell them, 'God, the Master, says: I'll dig up your graves and bring you out alive—O my people! Then I'll take you straight to the land of Israel. When I dig up graves and bring you out as my people, you'll realize that I am God. I'll breathe my life into you and you'll live. Then I'll lead you straight back to your land and you'll realize that I am God. I've said it and I'll do it. God's Decree.'"

Reflection

Imagine you are Ezekiel in the valley of the dry bones. Close your eyes and imagine what you see, hear, feel and smell. Let this imagining stay with you for a bit, and then say out loud to the dry bones...

Dry bones, listen to the Message of God! "God, the Master, told the dry bones, "Watch this: I'm bringing the breath of life to you and you'll come to life. I'll attach sinews to you, put meat on your bones, cover you with skin, and breathe life into you. You'll come alive and you'll realize that I am God!"

Close your eyes again. What do you see, hear, feel and smell?

Who are you prophesying to? Where are the dry bones in our world? Where are our dry bones? Where does this dryness come from?

An Illustration, from *Beloved* by Toni Morrison

"Uncalled, unrobed, unanointed... Baby Suggs, holy, followed by every black man, woman and child who could make it through, took her great heart to the Clearing....

After situating herself on a huge flat-sided rock, Baby Suggs bowed her head and prayed silently. The company watched her from the trees. They knew she was ready when she put her stick down. Then she shouted, 'Let the children come!' and they ran from the trees toward her.

'Let the mothers hear you laugh,' she told them, and the woods rang. The adults looked on and could not help smiling.

Then 'Let the grown men come,' she shouted. They stepped out one by one from among the ringing trees.

'Let your wives and you children see you dance,' she told them, and ground life shuddered under their feet.

Finally she called the women to her. 'Cry,' she told them. 'For the living and the dead. Just cry.' And without covering their eyes they women let loose.

It stared that way: laughing children, dancing men, crying women, and then it got mixed up. Women stopped crying and danced, men sat down and cried, children danced, women laughed, children cried until, exhausted and riven, all and each lay about the Clearing damp and gasping for breath. In the silence that followed Baby Suggs, holy, offered up to them her great big heart.

She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more. She did not tell them they were the blessed of the earth, its inheriting meek or its glorybound pure.

She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it.

'Here,' she said, 'in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it...it is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms I'm telling you. And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck, put a hand on it, stroke it and hold it up.... The beat and beating heart, love that too.... Love your heart....

Saying no more, she stood up then and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music. Long notes held until the four-part harmony was perfect enough for their deeply loved flesh."

Offering

Where is there dryness in your world where you might prophesy? Who needs to hear a word of hope? Who needs to hear a life-giving word?

Prayers of the People

This week, as you pray for those whom you know, pray too for those on the frontlines of this current crisis. Pray for communities around the world as we seek to find solutions to the virus, as well as the economic fallout.

Benediction

God has prophesied to those dry bones in the valley, and God has spoken to you. Even though we may be apart physically, know that in the Spirit, we are together. Prophesy! Speak to those who are dry that they might have hope and live.

Source material for this liturgy comes from *The Bible Workbench*, Vol 6, Issue 3 as well as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (New York, Plume, 1987), p. 87-89

This resource has been developed for the Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse for use by members and friends of its congregations.