

twelvebaskets



LENT 5A

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Lent 5 - Year A
29th March 2020



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

370 STF – Breathe on me, Breath of God OR

386 STF – In the beginning was darkness and nothing

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

565 STF – Only by grace can we enter OR

416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy

Readings: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

Hymn:

303 STF – I know that my Redeemer lives OR

345 STF – And can it be

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

163 STF – When listening prophets dare to speak OR

397 STF – The Spirit lives to set us free, walk, walk in the light

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

587 STF – I am the bread, the bread of life OR

367 STF – When I was lost, you came and rescued me

Blessing

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Call to Worship

Here, in this moment, on this morning, we have turned aside.

Here, we continue an ancient Jewish tradition of preserving a day for rest, a day for holiness, for an escape from production and busy-ness.

Here, we take a moment to breathe in, and to encounter the living, resurrected God.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

370 STF – Breathe on me, Breath of God OR

386 STF – In the beginning was darkness and nothing

Opening Prayers

Gentle, yet mighty

Lowly, yet almighty

Refugee, yet King.

In your power, strengthen us.

In your gentleness, guide us.

In your lowliness take away our selfish pride.

In your grace, forgive us.

In your majesty enable us to lift ourselves up so that others might see you in your full glory.

[Pause]

As a shepherd, watch over us,

As the King call us to be your royal priesthood

God who is our shepherd and King

Christ who was put to death and rose on the third day

Spirit who comforts and empowers

God that is three in one, be present in this worship service, and forever in our lives.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Matthew Forsyth

All Age Talk

[Show the congregation a balloon – not yet blown up].

What is this?

Is it much fun at the moment?

Can we have fun with it – what do we need to do?

Yes! We need to blow it up! Let's do that then...*[either blow up the balloon yourself or identify a willing volunteer with strong lungs!]*

Now, you might all need to bunch together *[take time to move people if they are in different parts of the church building]*, but I'm going to hit the balloon up into the air, and then we will see how long we can keep it from touching the floor!

[If this proves really hard, you may want to have a few goes!]

Well, that was fun wasn't it...

That balloon was pretty useless and uninteresting before, wasn't it, and then we blew breath into it, and it came alive!

In today's readings from the Bible, we will hear a little bit more about breath and the way it brings people to life and resurrection! Breath is very important for us isn't it? It is both really natural (we don't usually even notice we are doing it!) and really really important...

God breathes life into the human race at the beginning of Genesis. Perhaps today, as we breathe, we can notice the presence of God, alongside us, close by, in our very breath.

One of the ways we use breathing is to sing God's praise, so let's sing...³

Hymn:

565 STF – Only by grace can we enter OR

416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy

Readings: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

Hymn:

303 STF – I know that my Redeemer lives OR

345 STF – And can it be

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

Reflections on the readings

I wonder what pictures spring into mind when you hear about the “Valley (or Plain) of Dry Bones” in Ezekiel?

Perhaps you see an image of Death Valley or another of the vast deserts in the United States, arid and infertile, dotted with the horned skulls and skeletons of cattle who never made it to the water. Or perhaps, more shockingly, you recall seeing the heaps of bones of those killed in massacres or warfare? The bones dug up by archaeologists that tell the stories of those who lived and died many years ago? The grinning skulls of the dead in the catacombs?

Whatever images you see, “the Valley of Dry Bones” is not a good place to visit. It is a place whose dryness sucks the hope from us. It is a place of death and despair. It is a place we may encounter on our spiritual journey through life, but one we would rather avoid.

And yet God takes the prophet Ezekiel there and challenges him to look at the dry bones, perhaps those of his fellow countrymen who had been killed in some lost battle. Dead beyond recall. And God asks Ezekiel “O man, can these dry bones live?” What a question! Ezekiel’s reply would seem circumspect to us, but he knew his God well, “Only you, Lord God, know that”! And God entrusts Ezekiel with a prophecy that is a promise...they *shall* live. The Word of God spoken through his prophet will make it happen.

The Bible speaks to our imaginations as it describes what happens as Ezekiel prophesies. We hear a tremendous rattling sound as the bones fit themselves together. We see the sinews and the fleshing out of the skeletons, the clothing in skin that makes them recognizable human beings. Perhaps we want to start singing “Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones...the toe bone’s connected to the foot bone...etc. etc.”? But there is no real life in the bodies ... there is no breath, no spirit. And we are more than just bodies.

And so Ezekiel is told to proclaim God’s Word again, by calling to the wind (NIV breath) to breathe life into the dead. There is a very close link in the Old Testament between the words wind, breath, spirit, word and Yahweh, the name for God. And as he speaks those who had been dead rise to their feet. And Ezekiel prophesies that this is the Word of God for his people, too. They may feel cut off from their life in the dry spiritual desert of Exile, but God will breathe his spirit into them, give them new life and bring them home.

The Word of God rattles dry bones indeed. And in John’s Gospel, where the concept of Jesus as God’s Word is so central to his understanding of the story of our salvation, we hear the Word of God in his pronouncement “I am the Resurrection and the Life” to those lost in the desert of grief.

Lazarus, their friend and brother, had been dead for four days. His bones weren’t dry bones, but smelly ones, as down-to-earth Martha points out. All hope had dried up. Although they *had* had faith. Mary knew that if Jesus had been there it wouldn’t have happened. But Jesus hadn’t been there. But now he was, and prophesying that something marvellous was about to happen “to the glory of God”. At the mouth of the tomb, where Lazarus lies swallowed up by Death, the Word of God speaks:

“Lazarus, come out!” And Lazarus emerges, full of breath, the breath of Life once more, to blink in the glorious Light.

You might think that this story of a resurrection would be more appropriate to use in worship after THE Resurrection, not during Lent. It could be seen as a “spoiler” after all. But if you read on a bit further, you realise that the raising of Lazarus was not greeted as good news by all. The power of God’s Word to rattle dead bones and bring new life was seen as a challenge and a threat by those in positions of religious power. This miracle was, according to John, one of the triggers that led to the movement to have Jesus arrested and executed.

This Lent and Easter, are you ready to have your dry bones rattled by God’s Word for you?

Let us pray, using the response *Breathe on us, Breath of God: **Fill us with life anew.***

When life seems dry and meaningless, and you, Loving Lord, seem far away:
*Breathe on us, Breath of God: **Fill us with life anew.***

When the suffering and indifference we see around us take our breath away:
*Breathe on us, Breath of God: **Fill us with life anew.***

When we fear for the future and words of hope ring hollow in our ears:
*Breathe on us, Breath of God: **Fill us with life anew.***

When we feel exhausted by our efforts to be your servants and followers:
*Breathe on us, Breath of God: **Fill us with life anew.***

When the mystery of Death itself clings like a fog to our lives:
*Breathe on us, Breath of God: **Fill us with life anew.***

Jesus the Word said “I am the Resurrection and the Life”.
*Breathe on us, Breath of God: **Fill us with life anew.***

In his Name we ask it,

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

163 STF – When listening prophets dare to speak OR

397 STF – The Spirit lives to set us free, walk, walk in the light

Prayers of intercession

[This prayer can be read by two voices, but is equally suitable for one person]

On this day when we think of the temptations Jesus faced before beginning his ministry, we recognise how much selfishness, greed and power-seeking are harming the world we live in.

⁴ Reflections written by Christine Odell

So, we pray to our caring God

For all those whose lives are exploited, or destroyed, by the actions of people with power wanting more

.... and for those who seek power for their own ends, that their eyes may be opened to the harm that they are doing.

[Pause]

For all those who have lost employment, homes, family life and stability as a result of the indifference of organisations and people whose primary purpose is to make money for themselves

.... and for those who cannot see where their greed will lead them, that their consciences may be awakened to the consequences of their actions.

[Pause]

For those who are facing the realities of our careless use of the planet we all share

.... and for those who are unwilling to change their self-indulgent habits, that they may begin to recognise that some small changes can make a big difference.

[Pause]

For all those who have been led into trouble by the temptations placed before them by unscrupulous people

.... and for those criminals, indifferent to the suffering they cause to their victims, that they may be led to understand and to try to make reparation for their actions.

[Pause]

For all those who suffer day-to-day problems when organisations and officialdom create difficulties that cause distress and hardship

.... and for all those in public office who seem not to care for the people they represent, or serve, that they may begin to realise their true responsibilities.

[Pause]

For those in our church and community who are anxious, depressed, ill, lonely, or troubled by thoughts of times past when some incident occurred that has never been resolved

.... and for ourselves, as we remember those times when our relationships have been marred by our careless, unkind, greedy, deceitful, or selfish behaviour.

[Pause]

Help us to recognise that each one of us is responsible for our own actions and for the way that this can bring harm to others

.... and remind us that you are always ready to forgive and give us a new start, once we have come to our senses and asked for forgiveness and help.

[Pause]

Hear our prayers, loving God, and help us as we try to be the means of answering some of them.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Blessing the offering

We come to you, your Lenten people, accept our gifts we pray.

Help us to move beyond 'bread alone' and to see that all we have comes from you, O God.

Show us how to be a generous people, giving our love and our talents, not hiding them in private.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

587 STF – I am the bread, the bread of life OR

367 STF – When I was lost, you came and rescued me

Blessing

God of the wilderness places, journey with us we pray.

As we go from this place, inspire and uplift each one of us, to seek your kingdom come, your will be done, in this place and throughout your world.

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of Intercession by Marjorie Dobson

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker