

The Breath of Life Through the Spirit
A Sermon By: Rev. Tamera K. Jacobi
Ezekiel 37:1–14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6–11; John 11:1–45

Beloved in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

There are central images running through all our readings today, the images of breath, Spirit, and the astonishing power of God to bring life where life has collapsed.

It begins in a valley full of bones, moves through the depths of waiting, settles into the very center of our being, and finally arrives at a tomb filled with death and sealed by stone. However, in every place, the same truth rises: God breathes life where we see none.

We begin in “The Valley of Dry Bones”: In our first reading we meet the prophet, Ezekiel. He is known for his powerful and symbolic visions, preaching hope and restoration to the people in exile.

I want you to picture that valley in *Ezekiel 37*. Not a battlefield with the wounded still groaning. Nor is it a cemetery with names and dates carved into stone. It’s a valley of bones, dry, brittle, long forgotten.

It is an image for a people who have lost hope. A people who say, “Our bones are dried up. Our hope is gone. We are cut off from our homeland and God’s favor.”

In this vision, God asks Ezekiel, “Mortal, can these bones live?” Ezekiel doesn’t pretend to know.

He doesn’t offer false optimism. He doesn’t sink into despair. He simply says, “O Lord God, you know.”

And God says to Ezekiel, “Prophesy to the breath.” Speak to the Spirit. Call upon the winds of God.

So, Ezekiel prophesizes, and the breath of God, the Spirit comes. It rattles the bones. It knits them together. It fills them with life.

The miracle is not that the bones deserved it. The miracle is that God refused to leave them in the valley.

Some of us know that valley. The valley of grief. The valley of exhaustion. The valley of “I don’t know how to go on.”

And into that place, God still breathes.

Our Psalm lifts a cry to the Lord, Out of the Depths: Psalm 130 is the prayer of someone who has lived in that valley long enough to know its shadows.

“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.”

This is not a polished prayer. It is not a triumphant prayer. It is a prayer from the pit.

But notice what the psalmist does: They wait. They watch. They trust that God’s breath is coming.

“My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning.”

The psalmist’s hope is not in their own strength. Their hope is in God’s steadfast love, the same love that breathed life

into dry bones, the same love that hears the cry from the depths...our cries.

In it’s work the breath of God is not only creative, but also compassionate. It bends low. It listens. It lifts.

Paul speaks to The Spirit Who Dwells Within:

In *Romans 8*, Paul brings the valley and the depths right into the human heart.

“To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

Paul is not talking about two parts of us fighting for control. He is talking about two ways of living: one rooted in fear and self-reliance, the other rooted in the Spirit who dwells within all of us.

Paul gives us some astonishing news: “The Spirit of God dwells in you.”

It’s not just a visit by the spirit. It’s not an occasionally inspiring spirit. It is the Spirit of God that **dwells**.

The same breath that filled the valley now fills the believer. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead now lives in us a dwelling place for miracles.

The miracle of life is not only something God does *around* us, it is something God does *within* us.

Lazarus, Come Out:

Now we come to our gospel in *John 11* we hear the words, “*Lazarus, Come Out.*”

This is **the** event, the raising of Lazarus from the tomb, the catalyst that heralds Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

John tells us that Lazarus is dead. Not metaphorically. Not spiritually. Dead. Wrapped in linens and spices. Buried. Four days in the tomb.

Jesus arrives, he doesn't hurry and tears fall. Jesus wept at the death of his friend Lazarus. He stands before the tomb and says, "Take away the stone."

Martha protests, because the tomb smells like death. But Jesus insists.

And then Jesus prays; and he calls: "Lazarus, come out!"

And Lazarus does. Still bound up in linen. Blinking in the light. Still carrying the scent of the grave. But alive.

This is the power of God through Jesus Christ: A power that does not avoid death but enters into it. A power that does not fear the tomb but speaks into it. A power that does not leave us bound but calls us into the light and freedom.

We are invited by the Breath and Miracle of Life Today:
These stories are not ancient artifacts. They are the shape and the hope of our faith today.

When we feel like dry bones, God breathes. When we cry from the depths, God listens. When we feel powerless, the Spirit dwells within us.

When we stand at the edge of what feels like death, loss, despair, endings, Jesus calls us by name.

The miracle of life through the Spirit is not only resurrection at the end of time. It is resurrection now. It is the Spirit animating weary hearts, reviving tired hope, restoring broken courage, and calling us into a life we could not create on our own.

The power of God through Jesus Christ is not only the raising of Lazarus. It is the raising of *us* sinners, again and again, into trust, into love, into newness, into life.

A Closing Word of Invitation: Friends, The Holy Spirit, the very breath of God is moving still. It is moving in our valleys. It is rising from our depths. It is dwelling in our very being. It is calling us out of whatever tomb has tried to claim us.

We are called to feel that breath today. We are called to trust its power. May we walk, unbound and alive, into the light of Christ, filled with the indwelling and miraculous Spirit, the very breath of God.

Amen.