

June 2, 2024
Bonni-Belle Pickard
Dry Bones

(pre-service music)

Christ, Be Our Light – StF 706

Spirit of God, Bright Wind – FWS 2117 (The Faith We Sing, supplement
to The United Methodist Hymnal)

Spirit of the Living God – StF 395

=== ORDER OF SERVICE===

Call to worship

Christ, Be Our Light – StF 706

Prayer

Ezekiel 37.1-14 – Dry Bones

Meditation: Considering our Dry Bones

Spirit of God, Bright Wind – FWS (The Faith We Sing) 2117

Romans 8:22-27

Meditation: Body Prayer

Spirit of the Living God – StF 395

Meditation: Hope

We will walk with God (Sizohamba Naye) – StF 484

Intercessions and Benediction

You shall go out with joy – StF 487

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

The hand of the LORD came upon me,
and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD
and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.

He led me all round them;
there were very many lying in the valley,
and they were very dry.

He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?'

I answered, 'O Lord GOD, you know.'

Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to these bones, and say to them:

O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.

Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones:

I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.

I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you,
and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live;
and you shall know that I am the LORD.'

So I prophesied as I had been commanded;
and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling,
and the bones came together, bone to its bone.
I looked, and there were sinews on them,
and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them;
but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath:
Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath,
and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.'

I prophesied as he commanded me,
and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, 'Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel.

They say, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely."

Therefore prophesy, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD:

I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people;
and I will bring you back to the land of Israel.

And you shall know that I am the LORD,
when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people.

I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil;
then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD.'

Dry bones – left desolate – defeat, no one to bury the bones

Bones without Spirit cannot live

Our congregations – without God’s Spirit can be dead.... Enthusing, in-spiring

A desolate image, but one that Ezekiel was daring to face – and invites us to face as well

[guided meditation...]

Imagine in your mind’s eye that you are entering a dry, desolate place –

Perhaps it is a strange place,

Perhaps it is a place you know well...

Look around you – what do you notice?

Perhaps you are outside -- in a desolate place where there are drifts of dry sand

Or piles of rough rocks...

Or perhaps you are indoors -- in a lonely place,

maybe there are piles of old furniture in the corner

Or dusty stacks of papers or books...

Take a moment to notice what is in your dry, desolate place.

What does it feel like?

What does it sound like?

What does it smell like?

If this is a place you have not been to for a very long time,

Consider what has kept you away....

If this is a place where you find yourself frequently,

What brings you to this place today?

Take a moment to look more closely at one particular area of your dry, desolate place –

What do you notice?

Is there any sense of life?

Perhaps there are traces of life from the past –

What hints do you find of what was living there before?

Perhaps there are hints of life that is still struggling to be, to live...

Or maybe it’s just given up....

Is there anything that seems completely shut off?

As you watch in your mind’s eye,

Be aware of a breeze coming through.

Is it a warm breeze or a cool breeze?

What does it feel like?

What does it smell like?

What happens to the dead things that are around you
When the breeze brushes over them?

Perhaps the breeze is gently covering things that are long past their usefulness
But no one has bothered to bury.

What are those things?

Perhaps they were once beloved. Perhaps they still are.

Can their burial be a recognition of both love and putting to rest?

Look around you again – where is the breeze blowing now?

Is there any order? Or is it all blowing into confusion?

Is there any movement in new places?

Is anything new being revealed?

Imagine yourself being pulled slowly back from the scene –

What do you see when you're not up close?

Is there a larger picture?

What is the breeze doing to the whole scene?

The things you were looking at closely

The things that needed to be buried

And the things that were starting to come to life:

How are they blending?

Imagine that breeze again as the breath that carries love –

Perhaps you're reminded of someone who has loved you for who you are

Not for what they want you to be.

Get close enough to that breathing to feel it giving you life.

Turn your mind's eye back to the desolate scene you saw before.

Has it changed? What is different?

What has the breathing, the breeze inspired?

Is anything moving? Dancing? Swirling? Breathing itself?

Is the thing that was buried now at peace? Are you at peace with the burial?

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Ezekiel dares to go into a very dark place

And to see for himself that no place is completely deserted by God.

His brave exploration allows us to go to dark places as well.

It is our faith in the God-who-goes-with-us

That enables us to venture into places we dare not go on our own.

There are places in all our lives –

Our personal lives, our family lives,

Situations with our neighbours, our friends,

Even our churches

Where things often seem dark and desolate.

Places we often feel are Godforsaken.

But God does not forsake us.

Sometimes things and people and relationships and traditions we love die
And we feel sad.

Most usually, we want to avoid the change, the sadness, the disruption,
We want to be comfortable...

But very often God can use these situations to help us grow
Into what God needs us to be.

If you saw dunes of sand in your imagination,
You will know that sand dunes are always moving,
Even though they seem at first glance to be static...

The scriptures tell us that from the very beginning of time,
God was creating out of breath and movement and change –
We are in a long line of that in-spired God movement
That sweeps us up and into life-giving opportunities!
Opportunities for love and joy and peace –
In the midst of what seems like chaos or desolation...

Sing:

Spirit of God, bright Wind, breath that bids life begin,
Blow as you always do; create us anew.
Give us the breath to sing, lifted on soaring wing,
Held in your hands, borne on your wings.

Alleluia, Come, Spirit, come.

Alleluia, Come, Spirit, come.

Spirit of God, bright Dove, grant us your peace and love,
Healing upon your wings for all living things.
For when we live your peace, captives will find release,
Held in your hands, borne on your wings.

Alleluia, Come, Spirit, come.

Alleluia, Come, Spirit, come.

Spirit of God, bright Flame, send us in your holy name,
The power to heal, to share your love everywhere.
We cannot fail or fall, or know defeat at all,
Held in your hands, borne on your wings.

Alleluia, Come, Spirit, come.

Alleluia, Come, Spirit, come.

Spirit of God in all we gladly hear your call,
The life in our hands that sings, the power of your wings.
Born of your grace we rise, love shining in our eyes,
Held in your hands, borne on your wings.

Alleluia, Come, Spirit, come.

Alleluia, Come, Spirit, come.

Steve Garnaas-Holmes

Romans 8:22-27

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now;
and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit,
groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

For in hope we were saved.

Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?

But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness;

for we do not know how to pray as we ought,

but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit,

because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

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Some years ago, when I was studying in Atlanta to be a Methodist minister,

I found myself going one evening to a workshop on 'Body Prayer'.

I was very tired, exhausted mentally, physically, emotionally

From being a full-time student while taking care of my family

As well as holding down a part-time job at the church.

I really didn't want to go anywhere that evening,

But, like John Wesley on Aldersgate Day, which we will be celebrating last week,

I found myself going somewhat reluctantly to the workshop.

I was intrigued by the title: Body Prayer.

I knew one thing: my brain was too tired to pray.

So I hoped that I could just sit in the back and let somebody else do the praying.

I would watch (and maybe even fall asleep if no one was looking).

In another parallel with JW's Aldersgate experience,

The scripture that was read near the beginning of the evening

Was from Romans – which was also the book that Wesley heard on his evening...

What I heard was words about 'groaning' and 'sighing'

Especially the 'sighs too deep for words'.

That was exactly where I was... so I listened a bit more carefully.

Except, the workshop leader wasn't going to let any of us just sit there and listen.

She insisted that we get up out of our seats

And begin to pray with our bodies.

I must say that was a very scary proposition to begin with!

But again, I knew my brain was too full of everything else to pray with words --

So perhaps my body could do some praying instead.

We began first to sway a bit –

And I could feel a tiny bit of energy coming back ...

And then we started walking –

We walked slowly and deliberately in a circle

Not touching each other, but someone feeling very connected...

Eventually we did reach out and touch each other's hands –

Or place a hand on a shoulder –

We moved silently for a while
And then we moved with music...
And it was transforming.

I've done it many times since with many other groups –
Sometimes people have said they felt nothing.
Other times the energy was amazing...

I've come to recognise that energy as places where God's Spirit is in charge –
When we let go of what we think we should be doing or saying
And trust that our bodies can pray
And connect – with God and with each other –
And with the dry parts of ourselves
When nothing else will work.

Body prayer – different positions for prayer –
Sitting, standing, kneeling, lying down (prostrate or looking up or fetal position)
Hands folded, hands open
Arms folded, arms open
Hands holding others' hands
Walking
Walking a labyrinth – alone or with others
Dancing

Sing: Spirit of the Living God.... [acapella]

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The Romans scripture speaks, too, of Hope – and Hope saving us.
To me, that speaks of knowing that however dark the place we are now might be
That is both a place where God can be with us
And a place where we can be nurtured and comforted into a brighter place.

We often think of dark places as places of fear –
But there are comforting dark places as well –
The womb is dark, and yet it is a place of ultimate care.
Seeds germinate in the dark of the earth – that’s where their growth begins.
We sleep best in the dark of night –
And when the sun starts rising early in the spring and summer
Our night-time sanctuaries are less available...
As much as we love ‘light’, the dark places are also important.

The Hope of the dark places, then, is knowing that God is with us
And that God is working in and through us to help us grow into what we need to be.

Perhaps there are dark places in your life –
Or in the life of your congregation –
Perhaps it has been dark for a very long time
And you’re not sure if there will ever be light again.
Perhaps that dark place is where God is forming and re-forming you for something different.

It’s often said that a caterpillar has to descend into a chaotic glob of goo
Before it can become a butterfly.
I wonder what God is using the darkness, the chaos, the formless goo of your situation
To form you into....

The Romans scripture speaks of hope – and of living in hope as our salvation –
In essence, it’s reminding us that what we see now
Is not the sum total of what will be.
We only see a small bit of the whole picture that God is painting –
How can we guess what greater things will be revealed?
Perhaps we find ourselves all tied in knots
Because we anticipate disaster ahead –
But Hope reminds us that God is Good –
And God wants Good for us
And it will be good in the end,
And if it’s not good now, it’s not the end.
Hope allows us to wait patiently – expectantly – eagerly
to see what God has in store for us to be doing next...

Sizohamba Naye – StF 484
We will walk with God, my brother...

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Holy God, you, who are above all glory,
Have come to us time and again
In the basic bits of earthiness around us.
In the things we can touch and feel,
In tears and laughter,
In word spoken and music sung,
In the breath of the wind
The warmth of the sun
The smile of a friend
The comfort of deep sleep.

You who have given us everything
Are pleased as well to receive what offer you.

Lord God, sometimes it's very hard to give up things that have been very special to us
 We hold before you today
 Projects and events and ways of doing things that have been precious for us
We thank you for what each has meant to us
 For the joy and encouragement they brought to us – and to our faith
 For the way we were inspired and brought closer to you.
We confess that too often we have clung to the old
 Without recognising the “new” thing that you are doing in our midst.

We recognise now that the best way to honour the “old” ways
 Is to let them go – let them rest in our memories
 But relieve them of their responsibility for “now”
Help us remember with gratitude, help us say “good bye”...

And so, Gracious Father,
We offer to you our dry bones,
Which bring to mind memories of things we have had to lay aside.

Take our dry bones,
Along with our sufferings and our wounded-ness,
into your heart of loving memory, faithful caring, and holy healing.

Healing Christ,
We want to dream your dreams.
We offer to you our own hopes and aspirations,
That you might reframe them in your love.
Purify and refine our dreams
Until they become clear signs of your will for us.

Holy Spirit,
Pour upon these dry bones and our waiting hearts
Your love and direction.
Transform them and us in your life-giving love.

Lamb of God,
You take away the sin of the world.
Have mercy on us.

Lamb of God,
You take away the sin of the world.
Have mercy on us.

Spirit of God,
You take away the sin of the world.
Grant us your peace.

Yes, Lord, grant us your peace. Amen.