Worship Resources for April 6th, 2014—Fifth Sunday of Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

We begin with the Valley of Dry Bones in Ezekiel. Not a zombie apocalypse (sorry kids!) but a prophesy of life, that God will undo the very act of death. For the people of Israel, who had gone into exile, the exile was like a death to them (vs 11). Everything they had known was gone or was taken from them. Their temple destroyed, the city of Jerusalem in ruins, their families taken into a foreign land. But God was going to do a new thing. God was going to undo the power of the exile, and give the people hope and new life. The Spirit of God is the breath of God; it is Life, and through God, all life is possible.

Psalm 130 is a song of hope. A cry comes out of the depths, out of the darkness for God to hear. The psalmist sings of knowing God’s forgiveness, and that in God there is hope. Waiting for God is like waiting for dawn to come, but even greater than that—this is the very thing our soul desires, for God to enter our lives in a new way, and the psalmist sings that the people, too, can find hope in waiting for the Lord.

Romans 8:6-11 speaks of setting our minds on the Spirit, on life found in God rather than worldly life. Paul juxtaposes the life of the flesh with the life of the Spirit, but we need to be careful to not create a dichotomy of everything of the body is bad and everything of the soul is good—we are an embodied people who believe in an incarnate Jesus. Here, Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit that gives life, that is the very breath we breathe, and if we live in the flesh, we are living of the ways of this world. Living in the Spirit is about living for Christ and in Christ’s ways, living for others by loving our neighbor as ourselves. Living in the Spirit is about eternal life, and eternity begins now—it is not a life after death, but a life that continues from now throughout eternity. If we live of the flesh, we may believe in an afterlife, but we are not living it now. That is the difference between afterlife and eternity, between living of the flesh and Life of the Spirit.

John 11:1-45 is the final of four long discourses from John. This chapter encompasses the story of Lazarus, Mary and Martha. And while Lazarus is the one who falls ill and dies, the story focuses more on Mary and Martha. When Jesus finally comes to their home, after Lazarus has died, Martha goes out to confront him, but Mary stays home. Martha tells Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (vs. 21). Jesus responds to Martha about the resurrection, and Martha says she knows that there will be a resurrection on the final day as other Jews believed, but Jesus replies that he is the resurrection and the life (vs. 25). Jesus uses Lazarus to show that eternal life is new life beginning now. But it is Mary, when she finally confronts Jesus herself with the same words of her sister, who is able to move Jesus emotionally, and he begins to weep himself after Mary. When he calls Lazarus out of the tomb, he commands those nearby to unbind him and let him go (vs. 44). Death, which has a hold on us all, loses its power and is unbound with the resurrection.

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. While there are those who believe in life after death, Jesus declares the resurrection now. Jesus declares new life now. Jesus declares eternity now. But so many of us do not live into it. We live into this world, into worldly success and pleasures, instead of living into the eternal life promised of Christ by loving our neighbors as ourselves and living into Christ’s ways. But in God there is hope. In God there is the Spirit, which is the breath of life that moved over the waters of creation. In the Spirit there is always hope, new life, eternal life. Death does not have a hold on the Spirit, for the Spirit makes all things new.

Call to Worship

Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

 **Those who believe in Christ, though they die, will live.**

Everyone who lives and believes in Christ will never die.

 **We believe in the Messiah, the Son of God.**

Christ has come into our world

 **Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again.**

 **Let us worship the living Christ, who is the resurrection and the life. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Spirit of Life, we confess that we do not live into the promise of life. We are focused on success, on having more, on being satisfied and comfortable. We have turned away from the promise of life in You to pursue worldly pleasures that will eventually leave us empty. Only You can fulfill us, and by serving You in loving others and caring for the needs of others, we find Your Spirit of life in us. Forgive us for chasing empty promises and wealthy dreams, and turns us back to Your ways. In the name of Christ, who teaches us, guides us, and leads us into life, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. In Christ there is light, there is life, there is hope. You are forgiven. You are given new life, eternal life that begins now. The Spirit of Life is upon you. Go and share the good news. Amen.

Prayer

Living Water, You have risen up in us so that we will never thirst for You, because You are not far away in a temple or high up above the clouds, but in our hearts. Though we search high and low for You and long to be near You, we know from Scripture and from experience You are in each of us. Call us into the life promised for us, a life of hope, by becoming living hope for others. May we hear Your call on our lives to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with You, knowing You are alive in us. In Your name we pray. Amen.