

"MY SPIRIT WITHIN YOU"

Muhlenberg
2 April 2017

John 11: 1-45
5 Lent A

Through the prophet Ezekiel God spoke to the people of Israel long exiled in Babylon that even though they clearly cried, "*our hope is lost; we are cut off completely*" – they are instead safely and forever in the care of the one who first breathed life into them and will do so again. God speaks, "*I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live...*" (*Ezek. 37:14 NRSV*) *My spirit within you.*

The psalmist laments, "*Out of the depths have I called to you, O Lord; hear my voice...*" And then one of my favorite verses from the psalms, "*My soul waits for the Lord, more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning...*" to which comes this hopeful reply: "*O Israel, wait for the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy...*" (*Ps.130:5-6 NRSV*)

Lent is a time for reflection, repentance and – heart-wrenching lament. Sometimes, I'm not sure we allow ourselves enough time or emotional space to just let go and cry out to God with the full force of our sorry, anger or fear. It's too frightening, perhaps. If we go there, can we come back?

About what are you despairing this morning? What has you feeling like a valley of dry bones, dried up, hopeless and completely cut off? Maybe it's a relationship... a health issue... growing older... politics... finances... kids...exams... your faith? Maybe a combination of these things.

Whatever it is that robs you of hope, joy, love, laughter, health, energy and faith – this is a perfect time in the church year to identify those things and cry out to God with honest lament and genuine confession – because, as St. Paul points out – part of what binds us up and closes us off from ourselves, others and life itself – is when our mind gets stuck on the things of the flesh and death rather than seeing God's Spirit and life at work all around us! Believe me, I've been there!

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, when we feed our spirit with a constant diet of bad news, yelling commentators and dire predictions – what can we expect to result other than depression, anger and fear? Don't get me wrong – we can't and should not hide from the harsh realities of our lives or shrink from our responsibility as the church to speak out against any injustice. For example, today we join the deep sorrow of the family of MJ Sharp, killed in the Congo. And, we can add many other sad and sadistic headlines or personal fears and worries – can't we?

So, today the readings remind and teach us to pour out our sorrows, like Martha and Mary did to Jesus when they waited and worried and wailed without relief for their brother Lazarus; or like the people in exile in Babylon; or like the cries of the psalmist. Go ahead! God can take it...

More than that... God will take our cries, our fears and our despair and breaks us free from all that binds us – even death itself. Because with God, nothing is impossible. With God, there is no boundary that cannot be broken and breached. With God's Spirit new life is breathed into anything or anyone – no matter how dead and desolate it may seem...

We cry out and God responds. We may wait... for what seems an eternity... Wait *more than those who watch for the morning* ... But our waiting will not be in vain.

Today we pour out our dry or broken heart to God. And God responds, *I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live...* And Jesus cries out with a loud voice, *Lazarus*, (or John, Ayda, Tasha, or Bob), [or your name!] *come out! Unbind him*, (or her or them), *and let them go...*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.