

REFLECTIONS ON THE LECTIONARY FOR LENT 5, YEAR A

FROM BISHOP SUSAN HAYNES

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 130

Romans 8:6-11

John 11:1-45

Ezekiel 37:1-14

In this well-known passage from Ezekiel, the prophet speaks to a people in exile. The Israelites have been marched against their will to Babylon and long for a return to their homeland. Ezekiel invites them to consider a valley of dried out scattered bones – a desolate place filled with dust and lack of life. No one can possibly imagine that these bones could come to life again. And yet Ezekiel's prophecy is not only that they will live again but that they will live in health with fresh breath and vigor. God revivifies that which is dead. He causes new breath to enter where there wasn't breath, and He brings the feet of the Israelites back from the soil of exile to their own soil, their own homeland. ***In our current situation do we sometimes feel that we are in exile – on a soil that is not our own where perhaps hope is dusty and dried up? As we contemplate our lives, do we see bones scattered about that need life breathed into them? What would your life look like if those bones were to rise again with life and vigor? What is your experience of living on "your own soil?"***

Psalm 130

This heartfelt response to the Hebrew Scripture resonates with us as we often feel ourselves in the depths, and waiting – waiting for light to enter the world. The Psalm ends with a reminder that the God we worship is the author of forgiveness and redemption. ***When was the last time you told God that you were waiting for Him expectantly?***

Romans 8:6-11

In this section of Paul's epistle to the Romans, Paul sets up a contrast between life lived in the flesh and life lived in the spirit. For Paul, the mind that is set on the flesh is synonymous with sin. When one's attention is turned to fleshly energies, one is tempted to forget about one's ultimate dependence on God. In a sense, there is a connection with the spirit and how we live our bodily life. If our mind is set on anxiety and fear, our energy is used up worrying about outcomes instead of focusing on the provision of God. It is exhausting to live with fear and anxiety. If our minds are set on things of the spirit, then we can ask God to remove fear and anxiety and replace our thoughts and emotions with those that He would have us to experience. ***Where is your energy? Are your energies focused on things that you want to change that you have no control over? Or are you focused on a life in God where He provides the changes that are needed?***

John 11:1-45

This week we have another long selection from the Gospel of John. It is a familiar story, however, of the raising of Lazarus from the dead and is considered one of the many signs in John that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. It is also perhaps the gift of a peek or a glimpse into what is going to happen with Easter. For Mary and Martha, and for those gathered with them, Lazarus is dead – completely and surely dead. In fact, while his body does not quite present as the dried up bones from Ezekiel, in the minds of those who have gathered, he has about as much chance of living again as those bones did. But Jesus's promise to Mary and Martha is that if they believe, they will see the glory of God. Jesus's voice compels obedience as he cries, "Lazarus, Come Out!" This order is followed quickly by the command that Lazarus be freed of the grave clothes which bind and restrain him. Those clothes are for the dead, not for the living. And Lazarus is now certainly among the living. ***Where are you right now? Are you among the living, or are you in a dusty, dried out tomb longing to hear Jesus's command for you to come out? From what grave clothes do you need to be unbound and set free? Can you possibly understand that if you believe you will see the glory of God?***

Collect for the Fifth Sunday in Lent:

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*