

**HAGERSVILLE UNITED CHURCH &
SPINGVALE UNITED CHURCH
SUNDAY, MARCH 29th, 2020**

Ministry of Caring: The Whole People of God
Ministry of Pastoral Care & Worship: Pastor Peggy Bartlett
Cell: 905-317-5275 Email: info@hsupc.ca
Website: www.hsupc.ca
Church: Hagersville- 905-768-5863 Springvale- 905-768-1501

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REGIONAL COUNCIL PRAYER CYCLE

Binkley United Church (Hamilton)

*CLOSE ENCOUNTERS AT THE CROSS: MARY, MARTHA, LAZARUS
Fifth Sunday in Lent*

*Hope is not only a life and death matter, hope is a life in death matter.
Hope finds its greatest challenge, and shines its greatest light, when life
stands in the face of death and affirms that God remains trustworthy.
Our scriptures today bring us to Ezekiel, who is called to prophesy such
hope in a valley of dried bones and lost dreams. The psalmist proclaims
hope from the depths, as one who waits for the gift of a morning yet to
dawn. And Jesus, stricken with a grief born of love, speaks hope into
Lazarus's tomb, calling his friend forth as a sign of God's glory and of
our hope.*

CALL TO WORSHIP

God says: I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live. Will you believe?

Lord, we lift your name on high. Lord, we love to sing your praises.

Jesus says: I am the resurrection and the life. Will you live as if this were so?

Lord, we lift your name on high. Lord, we love to sing your praises.

Jesus called: Lazarus, come forth!

Jesus still calls: Springvale United...Hagersville United, come forth!

Lord, we lift your name on high. Lord, we love to sing your praises.

***OPENING HYMN:** #371 Open My Eyes, That I May See (Vs. 1)

1 Open my eyes, that I may see
glimpses of truth thou hast for me;
place in my hands the wonderful key
that shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

OPENING PRAYER

God of life, present and promised, you are the One to whom we call:
for you are the One who hears, and you are the One who acts,
bringing us new life with your grace and love and power.
Lead us in our time of worship, that we may be prepared to follow your
lead in places where life is at risk—places where hope seems far away,
places where dreams die during sleep. When we leave these walls, help
us live the teachings we proclaim within this place of worship, through
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Forgive us, O God, when we see the world through rose-colored glasses
rather than as it really is, much less the way you seek it to be. Forgive
us, Holy One, when we forsake lively and risky faith calling us to be
agents of change in our world Renew us with your grace and ground us
with your Spirit, that we might be empowered to live, in word and deed,
as testimonies to the power of your love over the grave. In Jesus Christ,
we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS: Ezekiel 37:1-14 Readers Theater: Dry Bones

Ezekiel: I felt as if God's hand was upon me. By the spirit I was
carried to the middle of valley—a dry valley, covered in...bones. God
led me around that valley, around those bones. There were so many.
Old. Brittle. Dry. And then I heard God's voice!

God's Voice: You. I ask you, can these bones live?

Ezekiel: God, Most High, you know.

God's Voice: Then be a prophet, Ezekiel. Speak to these bones. Say to them: (God's Voice whispers in Ezekiel's ear.)

Ezekiel: So I did as God commanded me. I said to the dry bones, "O dry bones, hear God's word! God says to you, 'I will breath into you, and you will live.' God says to you, 'I will put muscle and flesh on you. I will cover you with skin. I will fill you with breath. You will live, and you will know that I Am God!' And when I finished speaking, there was a terrifying sound. Bones rattling against stone. Bones rattling against other bones. Bones coming together, each finding its proper place. And, as I watched, muscles grew, and flesh grew, and skin covered the new bodies. But they were lifeless. There was no breath in them.

God's Voice: Speak to the breath, prophet. Say to the breath: (God's Voice whispers to Ezekiel.)

Ezekiel: So I prophesied to the breath, I spoke the words given to me, like I had never spoken before, "God says to you, 'Breath: come from the four winds, breathe into these who were killed, so that they may live!' The breath came into them. They lived. They stood on their feet. Thousands upon thousands of them!

God's Voice: Man? Listen to me. These bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost, we are cut off completely." So prophesy to them. Tell them that God, their God, is going to open their graves, and bring them back to life, and back to the land of Israel, O, my people! In that moment, you will know that I am God! I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live. I will take you home, and you will know that I have spoken. I have acted.

Ezekiel: So I did exactly that. And so did God.

One: This is the witness of God's people.

All: Thanks be to God!

RESPONSE: "Spirit God, Be Our Breath" (MV 150) Vs. 1
Spirit God: be our breath, be our song. Blow through us, bringing strength to move on. Our world seems inward, defensive, withdrawn... Spirit God, be our song.

READERS' THEATER: CLOSE ENCOUNTERS AT THE CROSS: MARY, MARTHA, LAZARUS

Bases on John 11: 1-45

Narrator: Jesus had been informed that one of his most beloved friends, Lazarus, was gravely ill. But he insisted that this illness would not lead to death but would be used by God as a witness to the Son of God. But word came to Jesus that Lazarus had died and all were saddened by the news. Jesus insisted that this was the time to go to the home of Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus. Before Jesus arrived, Martha got word that he was on his way, and she hurried out to meet him.

Martha: Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.

Jesus: Your brother will rise again.

Martha: I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.

Jesus: I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?

Martha: Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.

Narrator: And having said this, Martha returned home to tell Mary that she had spoken with Jesus, who was on his way to see them. Mary got up quickly and ran out of the house to see Jesus.

Mary: Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

Jesus: Where have you laid him?

Mary: Lord, come and see.

Narrator: They led Jesus to the tomb in which Lazarus had been laid. All those who followed Mary and Jesus were amazed and moved by his love for his friend Lazarus. When they arrived at the cave, Jesus gave them instruction.

Jesus: Take away the stone.

Martha: Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.

Jesus: Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?

Narrator: And so they rolled the stone away.

Jesus: Father, I thank you for having heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me. Lazarus, come out!

Narrator: And Lazarus came out, his hands and feet bound with the strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth.

Jesus: Unbind him, and let him go.

Narrator: Many of the people who had come with Mary and Martha to the tomb had seen what had happened and they believed in Jesus.

[Martha, Mary, place their cloths on the arm of the cross and they depart]

Narrator will place green on the cross representing Lazarus, new life.

MESSAGE

Here we are ... first it was suspended gatherings 200 and then smaller than 50. Barely 24 hours later the Premiere urged us to reduce groups to no more than ten people.

No More CHURCH - ough

I found myself wondering, “What next?”

You probably already know. Tons of people are now working from home. Staff members attend meetings at a distance using Zoom or similar platforms. We are at-home isolation. Major industries have halted production. Malls have closed. Acceptable personal space has been increased to six feet. And of course churches have replaced with emails or you tube worship services.

“What next?”

Initially, my “what next” thoughts of my steadily rising tide of anxiety. And then a funny thing happened. I had an “aha” moment about that very question. “What next?” is the perfect where-is-God-in-that

question. It’s the question to ask when you’re looking for God in this messy, beautiful, terrible world.

Reviewing our Lenten journey. Jesus himself taught us to look for positive in a situation.

Jesus himself was challenged by Satan, who would give him power over the world. He stood strong even though he was starving and said NO! it is written “do not put your God to the test”.

The Jesus had a visitor one night... a lawyer named Nicodemus. A man of knowledge of scriptures seeking answers for some of his questions. Jesus told him he was a powerful teacher but needed to understand that we all must be lifted up and believe. Ending with the powerful verse that we all know so well. John 3:16.

Then Jesus and his friends met a man who had been born blind. His friends wondered aloud where God was in this. Could this man have sinned? Maybe it was his parents? His blindness could be God’s punishment for something they did or failed to do. In other words, they asked, “Why did God do this?” Jesus replied this man did not sin and healed his blindness.

Jesus also had an encounter with the Samaritan Women at the well. Jesus was resting by well and she came to draw water.... he spoke to her “Give me a drink”. Much to her surprise she asked Why? Why would a Jew even speak to Samaritan women? Through their meeting and her excitement of sharing with many Samaritans from that city of Sychar, they believed.

This week Jesus had been informed that one of his most beloved friends, Lazarus, was gravely ill. Before Jesus arrived, Martha got word that he was on his way, and she hurried out to meet him. Lazarus had died. Sadness availed, grief and tears. They led Jesus to the tomb in which Lazarus had been laid. All those who followed Mary and Jesus were amazed and moved by his love for his friend Lazarus. When they arrived at the cave, Jesus gave them instruction. “Roll the Stone Away” and Lazarus came out. Jesus told them to unbind him, and let him go. Many of the people who had come with Mary and Martha to the tomb had seen what had happened and they believed in Jesus.

Lots of people ask “why?” when confronted by sad news and bleak circumstances. Some wonder if God caused the current pandemic. But Jesus tells them that, if they’re looking for God in this messy world, “why” is the wrong question to ask.

In other words, ask a better question. Recognize how things actually are and then ask: What will God’s love do about it and how can I participate in that loving response?

The “*Vision of the Valley of the Dry Bones*,” is a very familiar passage of Scripture. He is speaking to the nation of Israel, v. 11. He sees them as a dead nation. He promises this dead nation that a day will come when He will raise them from the dead and use them again for His glory.

When Ezekiel received this vision, he found himself surrounded by the bones of the dead. Everywhere he looked he saw dead people. He was commanded to preach to them. And, he was commanded to pray over them. When he obeyed the Lord’s command, Ezekiel saw those dead bodies brought back to life.

Like Ezekiel, we are surrounded by the uncertainty everyone asking “What’s Next”. Everywhere we look there is evidence of the spiritual death that dominates our world. And, like Ezekiel, we have been the strength and the faith to be sent out to tell the World that they can live.

From where Ezekiel stood that day, his task must have seemed impossible. Yet, he obeyed God and the Lord blessed his efforts. From where we stand today, the task of reaching out those who question, those who have little or no faith also seems like an impossible task. If we will do as the Lord has commanded us, we will also see Him bless our efforts.

I am not going to ask “What’s Next” anymore...this too will pass. Keep the faith, hold on to all that is good in the world. God is with us, we are not alone thanks be to God!

***HYMN:** #560 O Mater, Let Me Walk with Thee (Vs. 1)

1 O Master, let me walk with thee
in lowly paths of service free;
teach me thy secret, help me bear
the strain of toil, the fret of care.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of all things seen and unseen, if you had insulated yourself from the pain of the world, then your name could not be love and our condition would be without hope. Thank you for being so personally involved, for revealing your complete commitment in Jesus of Nazareth. Through him we pray with hope, in him we pray with love.

Let your healing love be known this day by all who suffer ailment of body, or distress of mind, or agony of spirit

Please reveal your compassion, **Loving God, bring wholeness to all.**

Let your intimate love be known today by all who feel forgotten or lost, and all who are walking in the dark valley of despair.

Please reveal your compassion, **Loving God, bring wholeness to all.**

Let your fierce love this day redress the wrongs of all who suffer exploitation, injustice, abuse, neglect, violence or unwarranted imprisonment.

Please reveal your compassion, **Loving God, bring wholeness to all.**

Let your nurturing love today encourage those who are gathering resolve to make tough decisions, take on new responsibilities, or break free from some bondage.

Please reveal your compassion, **Loving God, bring wholeness to all.**

Let your relentless love this day upset congregations that have become self-centred or even contemptuous of other churches.

Please reveal your compassion, **Loving God, bring wholeness to all.**

Let your reconciling love today gather together the separated Christians, and make them aware of the fellowship and mission of the one, universal body of Christ

Please reveal your compassion, **Loving God, bring wholeness to all.**

Let your inspiring love this day rejuvenate pastors, priests and prophets who have become weary to the very roots of their souls.

Please reveal your compassion, **Loving God, bring wholeness to all.**

Thank you for hearing us, most loving God. With the whole body of believers in time and eternity, we want to love, praise and serve you, today and evermore. Through Christ Jesus your true Son. **Amen!**

***CLOSING HYMN: #424 May the God of Hope Go with Us**

- 1 May the God of hope go with us every day,
 filling all our lives with love and joy and peace.
 May the God of justice speed us on our way,
 bringing light and hope to every land and race.
 Praying, let us work for peace,
 singing, share our joy with all,
 working for a world that's new,
 faithful when we hear Christ's call.
- 2 May the God of healing free the earth from fear,
 freeing us for peace, both treasured and pursued.
 May the God of love keep our commitment clear
 to a world restored, to human life renewed. R

SENDING FORTH

One: Each step on Christ's Way, each step of our lives, takes us to new places, new times. Some of those are times to rest— like Jesus did, when he stopped to pray. Some are times to be challenged— as Jesus was. Some are times to celebrate, even in the face of upset and of grief ... and in these times remember that we are a people loved by God.

All: We, let us go into God's world, will live signs of this love, listening for the Spirit, loving one another, worshipping our God!

One: And the peace of Christ, that passes all understanding, rests and remains with us, now and forever.

All: AMEN!

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