

I am sad that we cannot worship together, but I am thankful for technology and the support and connection that it offers during our time apart. After you have worshipped with me, feel free to forward this on to others that you believe may benefit from it.

Because we cannot worship together, I have put together a short message and prayer so that we can be together in mind and spirit. If we would have worshipped together, the service would have been based upon the following scripture passages. I recommend that you listen to a favorite hymn or Christian song to lead you to a place of worship, and then read the scriptures before continuing with my message.

Let us pray: Lord, open our hearts and minds to your Word. Give us understanding and insight as you speak to us today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalms 130

Romans 8:6-11

John 11:1-45

Where are we now during this COVID-19 pandemic? In a way, we are in the valley of dry bones of Ezekiel. We are in a period of waiting as expressed by the psalmist. We are in a place that we are challenged to live the life of the Spirit as discussed by Paul in his letter to the Romans instead of living selfishly and in fear. We may be standing outside the tomb wondering if life as we knew it will ever return or if it is lost forever.

In Ezekiel, the valley of dry bones represents the people of Jerusalem and Judah. They were once full of life and vitality, but suddenly found themselves in exile, scattered, disconnected, broken. The life they had known was gone. They saw no way to recover and return to the vital community that they once had been. They lay separated, in despair, without hope.

We, as a nation, suddenly find our lives changed. Many of us live isolated, disconnected from personal contact with one another. Some are experiencing loss of income, loss of livelihood, without hope that they will ever recover. Some are numb, and all of us are waiting, waiting, waiting.

During times of fear and the unknown, our human inclination is to draw inward, to protect ourselves and our resources, to be self-centered. Paul calls this attitude selfishness and warns the Romans, and us, that this is not the way of the Holy Spirit.

We find ourselves waiting for recovery, waiting for God to act, just as Mary and Martha did after they notified Jesus that Lazarus was deathly ill. Hating the wait, desiring for God to do something now instead of later, wanting to be in control of the outcome – these thoughts and feelings are now part of our daily lives.

The passages in Ezekiel, Psalms, Romans and John speak of one hope – resurrection power! Just as God breathed life into the dry bones, He will breathe life back into our homes, workplaces, communities, nation and world. We will be restored to our daily activities and work. We will be fully alive and thriving once more, able to come and go as we please, without fear and death all around us.

We will be allowed to grieve for those we have lost. Our economy will recover. We will be freed from this valley of dry bones.

As we wait, we need to remember, as Christians, we claim that the same Spirit lives within us that raised Christ from the dead. Throughout Romans, Paul shows us that if we are living in the Spirit, we are able to cast away our old nature of sin, including self-centeredness and selfishness. We are transformed, by the grace of God, to be loving and caring towards one another. We do what's right and just, helping others with their needs and working together in service to the Lord. We are patient with and kind to one another. We pray often. This is what a Spirit-led community looks like, living out the resurrection. This is what we can be as the church in ministry to one another and our communities during and following this difficult time.

God will act – in His time and not in ours. We have to believe that God has a greater purpose beyond what we can see or know. We don't understand why these things happen or why God doesn't intercede right now. Just like Mary and Martha, we will experience hurt, maybe for a long time. But remember, Jesus wept. He wept for his friend, Lazarus, and He weeps for us until such time, as God in all of His wisdom, restores us and makes us whole again. We have the promise of resurrection power! As the psalmist wrote in verse 5, "I hope, Lord. My whole being hopes, and I wait for God's promise."

Let's pray:

*Abba*, Father, we praise you and honor your Holy name. We are thankful that you call us your children and keep us in your love and care; that through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, you give us guidance, direction and companionship through prayer and your Word. Help us during this time of uncertainty to trust in You. Forgive us for our sins. Breathe new life into us and help us to live in the way of the Spirit, being Christ-centered, not self-centered. Show us how to put our gifts to work so that all we say and do will glorify your name. Remind us daily of your resurrection power and the hope that you have provided through your Son, Jesus Christ. Be with those who are ill and suffering. Give them strength and courage. Supply the health care providers with the equipment and staff that they require to give excellent care. Help them to restore health to the hurting, and at the same time, keep them healthy and safe. For those who have lost loved ones, we pray for comfort and peace, peace that passes all understanding. Be with them in their grief and wrap them in your loving arms, as many of them are isolated from the support and hugs that they long for from their family and friends. Make us aware of those around us that need our help and empower us to act as Spirit-filled Christians. Be with our government leaders at all levels. Give them strength, good health, guidance and direction. We pray that they will seek your Will and act according to it. All power, glory and honor is yours, Almighty God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Peace and love to you,

Pastor Joni