

## Scripture and Sermon for Sunday, April 2, 2017

### Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord."

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord,

have spoken and will act, says the Lord."

### **John 11:1-45**

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them."

After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and

met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "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 said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "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?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.

Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew 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." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Let us pray... Amen.

Have you ever heard of Christians being called 'people of the resurrection'? Or 'the resurrection people'? I have. And I believe it to be true. Most, if not all of our theology hinges on the resurrection of Jesus. We celebrate his birth and his triumph over death, and though it looks like Christmas is the bigger holiday, we all know that Easter is the more meaningful celebration for those who follow Jesus.

Death and Resurrection. A theme that is infused in our faith lives, in our personal lives, in our congregational lives. We all live, and we all die. This is something we are constantly struggling to accept about our existence here on earth.

In a literal sense, we are born, we live, and we die. In a symbolic or metaphorical way, things are born, they live, and they die. And sometimes, in very special circumstances, things can be resurrected: brought back to life after death.

Medical science has progressed so that people who have stopped breathing, whose hearts have stopped beating, can be brought back from clinical death.

Relationships can be resurrected, ideas that we thought were long dead can have new life. The universe shows us that from dead and collapsing stars come black holes, that consume everything around them, and produce new stars, with renewed energy and vigor.

God has created a universe that provides for the possibility of resurrection. We even conceive of the after-life, the eternal life, as a form of resurrection.

If you've heard me speak at a funeral, you'll know that I usually mention that the unique energy of a particular person is not really gone. Their spirit, their energy cannot be destroyed, but is in a different form. We think of that different form as being in heaven. We hope, but we do not know for sure.

Our Hebrew scripture this morning tells of a time when God commanded the prophet Ezekiel to prophesy to the dry bones in the valley. To preach to them until they rose up. To encourage them until sinews and flesh and breath came upon them again. A resurrection of sorts.

And our Gospel lesson recounts the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

These two stories give us some important clues about how we might proceed as a congregation facing resurrection: we too are facing an ending, and hoping for a new beginning.

While the actual gift of resurrection may come from God, or Jesus, did you notice in both of these stories who does all the work? The lay people. People like you and me.

God may have been the impetus behind the dry bones rising, but God had Ezekiel do the work of prophesying to them. Jesus may have been the impetus behind Lazarus being raised from the dead, but the people gathered were the ones who had to unbind him from his shroud.

Whatever form of death may come over Fairmount Community Church United Church of Christ, *we* will be the ones who have to preach to the dry bones, and *we* will be the ones who have to unbind the shroud so that the church can live again.

The energy, the spirit that is unique to FCC UCC will not be gone when we no longer have a building, it will be in a different form, ready to become whatever God calls us to be. *But we will have to do the work!*

There is a big difference between resurrection and living: God is in charge of the resurrecting, but we are, in fact, in charge of the living part. That's on

us. God provides the spark of life, but we provide the resolve to go on living. God can jumpstart our body, but we have to be the ones that get the food and water, that determine our purpose in our new life.

To most of us, the cycle of death and resurrection seems unnatural, artificial, strange and fearful. But in the universe, in the world that God has made, it is just another moment in time following the rules God has set upon us. Not unusual at all.

As a congregation, we will be yet another story in a long line of stories about death and resurrection. We have found an opportunity to be present and available to God for a new life. And we will be the ones who will have to unbind the body, who will have to preach to the dry bones of death, so that they may rise again to live a new life in Christ, a new life in God.

Thanks be to God, who gives us new life in Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Amen.