



seeking:

Can these bones live?

March 26, 2023 + Fifth Sunday in Lent

*An asterisk * invites you to stand in body or in spirit, and you are invited to read aloud responses found in **bold**.*

We welcome you to First Lutheran Church!

we GATHER here

In today's gospel, grief is experienced by many, including Jesus. This African American Spiritual provides a tone of lament.

Prelude — “Steal Away”

Setting by Stan Pethel
FLC Wind Ensemble

***Welcome and Words of Gathering**

Have you ever felt washed up, brittle, worn-down to the bone?

Have you ever felt grief lay heavy on your back?

Have you ever felt like hope was out of reach?

Have you ever wondered, *can these bones live?*

If you have, then you are in the right place, for this is God's house.

Hope lives here.

So, come. Rest your weary bones.

Let us worship Holy God.

In the same character, this slower spiritual has a mournful sound yet references many joyful acts of Christ: the raising of Lazarus, the washing of feet, and the defeat of death.

***Gathering Hymn** — no. 333

“Jesus Is a Rock in a Weary Land”

***Confession and Forgiveness**

Friends, there is nothing that we have to keep hidden from God—not our anger, our grief, or the ways in which we have fallen short. In confession, we speak honestly and are met with grace. So let us not hold back. Let us bring our full selves to this prayer, knowing that God is already running to meet us. Let us pray:

Jesus of Nazareth, I confess: I forget that you know this feeling.

I forget that you, too, have wept. I forget that you, too, have lost.

I forget that you, too, have gathered at the tomb,

have grieved for a friend, have felt the sting of humanity.

Forgive me for all the times I place blame on you.

Forgive me for all the times I create distance, imagining that you could never

feel what I feel. Forgive me for allowing the valley of dry bones to be a sea of

space between us. Pour yourself into the cracks in my heart. Bring these bones

back to life. Bring me closer to you. With gratitude I pray, amen.

Friends, you could spend your whole life ignoring God, pushing God away, or trying to solve the world's problems all on your own, and God would still love you all the same. In Jesus' name ✝, your sins are forgiven. Even in our shortcomings, we are God's beloved. So hear and believe this good news:
We are saved by grace through faith. We belong to God. We are not alone.

***Prayer of the Day**

May God be with you. **And also with you.** Let us pray.

Creator God, **why is bad news so loud? In the midst of gun violence, hunger, melting ice caps, and anxiety, it often feels like suffering has a microphone.**

How do we hear you? How do we find you? How do we know that these bones can live? Today we bring our raw selves into this space asking that once more you would rush through this room like a mighty wind. Remind us that these bones can live.

Speak to us in your still, small voice and let it be loud enough to speak to the sorrow of the day. We know that good news rests in you, and we know that you are here. So help us listen, not to the bad news of the day alone, but to the hope that you breathe into every word. With open hearts we pray, amen.

Stewardship Story Sharing

Betsy Paul

we LISTEN and RESPOND

A Reading from the first book of Ezekiel — 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 around 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."

Hear these words of old **as we seek to know God today.**

Psalm 130 — hymn no. 600

"Out of the Depths I Cry to You"

A Reading from Paul's letter to the Romans — Romans 8:6-11

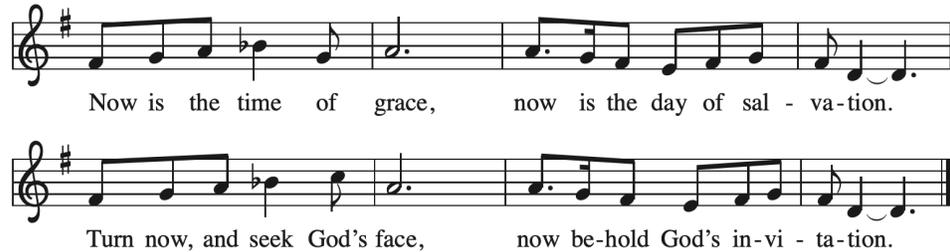
To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

The psalmody today comes from Martin Luther's paraphrase of Psalm 130, first published in 1524. Listen for the longing and "sighing" evoked by the music, well suited for a psalm of lament.

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Hear these words of old **as we seek to know God today.**

***Gospel Acclamation** — no. 918 from *All Creation Sings*



Now is the time of grace, now is the day of sal - va - tion.

Turn now, and seek God's face, now be-hold God's in - vi - ta - tion.

***Gospel** — John 11:1-45

The Gospel of John, the 11th chapter.

Glory to you, O God.

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.

The Gospel of Jesus.
Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon — "Unbind Us, Lord Jesus!"

Pastor Chris Culuris

***Hymn** — *from A Sanctified Art*

"When the Past Is Dead and Buried"

Jesus spends time in his grief before raising his friend from the dead. It is healthy to process grief and loss, and it can eventually be life-giving to journey with these emotions to a place where we are "unbound" and can "bloom" in the promise of new life.

When the past is dead and bu - ried
 When our hearts are bowed in sor - row
 When our spi - rits feel so bro - ken

Life - less in the bar - ren ground
 And the grief is new - ly wrought
 Wrapped in lin - ens and en - tombed

What good can e - merge from ash - es?
 Cry - ing "If you'd on - ly been here"
 With - out hope and with - out feel - ing

Where can an - y life be found?
 Weep - ing for what we have lost
 As the storm clouds 'round us loom

Breathe in deep the rush - ing Spi - rit
 Re - sur - rect our hearts and spi - rits
 Hear the words of life from Je - sus

Life is grow - ing all a - round
 Liv - ing God whom we ex - alt
 "Come out, be un - bound" and bloom

*Affirmation of Faith

P: You are invited to share in this litany of affirmation:

We believe that God loves us—**God loves us enough to weep when we are gone.**

We believe that God does not give up on us—**breathing new life into tired bones.**

We believe that God returns to us—**always seeking us when we are lost.**

We believe that God holds hope for us—**so we hold onto hope as well.**

We believe, help our unbelief. **In Christ's name we pray, amen.**

*Prayers of Intercession

A: Sustained by God's abundant mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all of creation.

You have breathed into us the breath of life. Enliven your church. Deepen our partnerships with our companion churches around the globe and bless the work of missionaries who accompany them. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Your spirit brings life to creation. Enliven the natural world and use us to restore ecosystems in need of healing. Uplift prophetic voices that turn us to the needs of the soil beneath our feet and the air all around. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

You redeem the world and its peoples. Free us from systems of oppression. Unbind nations and societies from the sins of racism, sexism, and homophobia. Raise up leaders at all levels of government who work to promote the dignity of every human life. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

You weep when we weep. Be present with those who grieve or who are troubled by illness. You hear us when we call to you. Deliver us from the depths of our despair, and free us from the worries that bind us. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Your Spirit of life dwells in our assembly. Bless the music ministries of this congregation and all who lead us in hymns of praise and thanksgiving and in songs of lament and prayer. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

You are the resurrection and the life. Even though we die, we will live. With thanksgiving, we remember all your saints who now live in your eternal love. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your steadfast love and your promise to renew your whole creation; through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

This North American folk hymn from the 19th century (hymn no. 666) speaks to love that is 'wondrous' and of freedom from death.

Offering

Music During Offering

"What Wondrous Love Is This"

Setting by Walter Pelz

*Offering Prayer

A: God of goodness and growth, all creation is yours, and your faithfulness is sure. Receive the gifts we bring, and nourish us to proclaim your abiding love in our communities and in the world, through Jesus Christ, our strength and our song. Amen.

we SHARE the meal

***The Great Thanksgiving** — pg. 161, *front of hymnal*

***Sanctus** — pg. 162, *front of hymnal*

***Words of Institution and Prayers**

P: God of the lost and the found, surely it is right for us to give our thanks and praise; for day after day we look for you, and day after day we find you: in the laughter of children, in the sun rising over the horizon, in the flowers of spring.

Our seeking does not go unanswered, and for that we are grateful.

So first and foremost, we come to you in prayer to say thank you, for when we're seeking beauty, you give us mountains and freckles, green eyes and brown eyes.

When we're looking for reason to hope, you give us rainbows after the storm, and candles flickering in the window. When we're seeking peace, you give us three part harmony and the sound of the rain.

And when we're seeking justice, your life reminds us that everyone is welcome at your Table, and none shall be turned away.

For all these reminders we are deeply grateful.

And yet, gracious God, our seeking does not stop.

For even though your fingerprints are all over this world, we are not yet at your promised day.

So in addition to our gratitude, we also pray today for conviction.

Do not let us get comfortable with half-hearted seeking.

Do not let us grow numb to the suffering of this world.

Make us relentless in our pursuit of justice—

relentless in our consoling of the grieving,

in our welcoming of the stranger, and in the feeding of the hungry.

Like a dog with a scent, may we walk toward your kingdom,

never giving up, never wandering off the path.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

And as we see and as we seek, pour out your Spirit on this ordinary bread and cup.

May this meal be the nourishment we need to continue seeking you in the world.

Until your promised day, we will pray. Until your promised day, we will seek, saying:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

***Invitation to the Table**

P: Friends, if your seeking has led you here, if your weary heart followed breadcrumbs all the way to this sanctuary, then I have good news: you do not have to seek anymore.

This table is God's Table.
So if you came here looking for justice,
then rest in the comfort that all will be fed here.
If you came seeking beauty,
then let your spirit marvel at the beauty of a community coming together.
If you came seeking a brush with the Divine,
then know that God is present in this ordinary meal.
So kick off your walking shoes. Let your weary heart stop the search.
We are standing on holy ground. This is God's Table.
All are invited. Come.

This morning, we will observe continuous communion. We sing a Marty Haugen Lenten hymn, which reminds us that we have a God "who lives beyond our death."

Distribution of Communion

Lamb of God — pg. 164, *front of hymnal*

Hymn — no. 334, Stanzas 1-3 and Lent 5 "Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery"

Prayer After Communion

P: God of manna and mustard seeds, we came to this Table hungry and we leave feeling full—full of hope, full of promise, full of what could be.

For we not only found glimpses of you at this Table, but we caught a glimpse of the way things could be: in a meal where all are welcomed and all are fed.

Is there anything holier than that?

Thank you for nourishing our curiosity alongside our spirit and our conviction.

May we always seek you the way you seek after us.

With grateful hearts we pray, amen.

Count the number of references to both death and life in this text! We sang this tune on Ash Wednesday as we received ashes, a sign of our mortality. On this last Sunday in Lent before Holy Week begins, we remember both that we are dust and that "Christ is the life beyond all time."

we DEPART to serve the world

Announcements

***Sending Hymn** — *see back page*

"Christ Is the Life"

***Blessing & Dismissal**

P: As you leave this place, may God bless you with seeking.

Seek out the hungry. Seek the weary. Seek the good in every person you pass.

Seek out the hopeful. Seek the faithful. Seek God in each of us.

As you seek and as you wonder, may you find what you are looking for.

A: In the name of our loving God, who is always seeking us, go now in peace. **Amen.**

***Postlude** — "Kingsfold"

Setting by Aaron David Miller

Acknowledgements

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Worship Assistants

Pastor: Chris Culuris

Director of Music: Emily Bruflat

Assisting Minister: Nancy Nelson

Audio/Video: Brett Peterson

Greeter: Cheryl Kautt

Reader: David Fienen

Ushers: Bill Kautt

Musicians: FLC Wind Ensemble

Communion Preparers: Judy and David Fienen

Communion Servers: Monique Sebring, Sharon Domeier

Announcements

- Refreshments after worship today will be served by the Fellowship Committee.
- Following worship today we will gather in the Dining Hall to continue our series *Making Sense of Luther*.
- Today is Pack the Pews Sunday. It's good to see the number of donations that have been made to the local food shelf. Thank you all so much. If you forgot to bring something, it's not too late! The blue tub will be in the entryway through next Sunday. You can drop off a donation at any time until then. And, as always, cash donations, in the form of checks made out to SPAF (the St. Peter Area Food Shelf) are always welcomed. If you choose to make a donation by check, be sure to date in March so that it can be counted as a part of the March campaign. Questions? Please contact Jan Jensen.
- Interested in joining a festival choir for Holy Week and Easter? We are looking for several more singers! Please consider joining on Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m. following worship. The choir will sing Passion Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. Contact Emily at musicflcstp@gmail.com for more information!
- Join us for Soup Supper on March 29 from 5:30-6:30pm in the Dining Hall. Worship service will follow at 7:00pm.
- Easter Sunday Continental Breakfast hosted by the Fellowship Committee, join us in the Gathering Space at 9:00am, before the Easter Service, for sweet rolls, fruit and beverages. A free will donation will be collected.

Prayers

- We lift up prayers for those on our long-term list: Elgene Lund, Chuck Petry, Bob Cady, Joan Williams, Betty Gustafson, Glenn Stryker, Erika Schuldt, Ursula McRostie, Karen Wendroth, Allen Storkson, Gene Roemhildt, Karen Smithers, Paul Aasen, Shirley Storkson, Dorothy Lutz, Claire Cardwell, and Ella Twaddle.
- We pray for the family of Judy Mechura who died on March 17; she is the sister in law of Kathryn Christenson.
- We pray for those who mourn family and friends who have recently died.



Holy Week at First Lutheran 2023:

April 2, 10:00 a.m. - Palm/Passion Sunday

April 6, 7:00 p.m. - Maundy Thursday

April 7, 12:00 p.m. - Good Friday Organ Recital

April 7, 7:00 p.m. - Good Friday Service

April 8, 7:00 p.m. - Easter Vigil

April 9, 10:00 a.m. - Easter Sunday



1 Christ is the life of all that is, God's pure cre - a - tive Word,
2 Christ is the death of all that is, a broad and beck - 'ning tomb,
3 Christ is the death of all that is, a bright, con - sum - ing fire,
4 Christ is the life of all that is, Be - gin - ning and the End;



whose pow'r be - yond and through all space the worlds to Be - ing stirred.
who wel - comes us from well - worn ways to dark - ness of the womb.
whose flames re - quire our pri - or self as kin - dling for the pyre.
cre - a - tive force, most peace - ful death, trans - form - ing burn - ing brand.



Christ is the life be - yond all time, cre - a - tion's birth and breath,
Christ is the death, the sink - ing down past all de - sire and fear,
Christ is the death of dust - y days of un - cre - a - tive strife,
Christ is the life, in whose wise love cre - a - tion lives and dies



whose la - bor brings all things to be and brings all things to death.
whose prom - ise in the gen - tle dark bids new - ness to ap - pear.
for out from fire we tread up - on the thresh - old of new life.
and thus for - ev - er - more shall bless the Source, the liv - ing Christ.