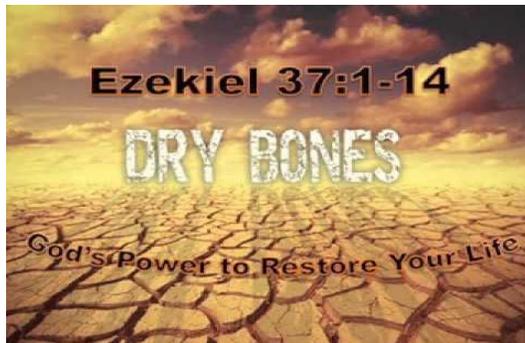


MARCH 22, 2026
FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT



St. John United Church of Christ
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Website: www.stjohnfairview.org
Rev. Rosemary Captain
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Pianist – Tami Hughes
Liturgy – Lavon Bayler
Ushers -

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able
and respond with words in bold print

SUMMARY OF TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

From "Preaching Through the Christian Year"

Fred Craddock

In their contrasts between life and death, the texts for today anticipate Easter. However, all of them focus more upon the life of the people of God this side of the grave than upon the resurrection as such.

Ezekiel 37:1-14 Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones is a prophecy that the people of Israel, dead in exile, will live again on their land.

Psalm 130 The psalm is an individual complaint song, a prayer that the Lord who redeems Israel and is motivated by God's steadfast love will save the person in trouble.

Romans 8:6-11 Paul compares the spirit with life and the flesh with death, for "to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace".

John 11:1-45 the account of Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

THE BELL IS RUNG:

PRELUDE: "One Tin Soldier" by Dennis Lambert and Brian Potter

PENNIES FOR MISSION: One Great Hour of Sharing

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

ONE: God calls us from the valley of dry bones.
Come, listen for a word from our God.

**MANY: We hear God calling us in a far distant voice.
We had early forgotten God's care for us.**

ONE: The Spirit breathes life into our dry bones. God
offers hope when we have lost our way.

**MANY: Our souls wait for the refreshment God
offers. Our Spirits are filled with great expectation.**

ONE: Christ came as a light to all the world. Christ
comes among us today to light our way.

**MANY: We hear the teacher calling for us. Christ
unbinds us that we may see and believe.**

***PRAYER OF INVOCATION:**

God of steadfast love, bring new life to this
community of your people. We are eager to hear
your voice and be filled with your Spirit. Come from
the four winds, O Breath, and bring vitality and
purpose to our gathering, that we might be energized
and encouraged. Hear our voices, lifted in praise and
crying out from our need. Be attentive to our

supplications, lest we die apart from you. Only you
can unbind us and set us free. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 288 "Let it Breathe on Me"**

***CALL TO CONFESSION:** To set the mind on the flesh
is death. Focused only on our own interest, we
cannot see God. The law of God is foreign to us, and
we are hostile to its demands. To live in sin –
separation from God – is death. Come now to the
promise of life as we confess our sin.

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

**Out of the depths we cry to you, O God. Hear our
prayers, the confession of our neglect, the
admission of our desire to rule in your place. Like
the house of Israel in Ezekiel's time we are cut off
from intimacy with you. We are like dead people,
going through the motions of living. We cry out for
forgiveness and a new start. We long to know you
and to live in reverence before you. By your
steadfast love, redeem us from our iniquities and
raise us up to serve you, in Jesus' name, Amen.**

(time for silent personal confession)

***ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:**

Jesus says to us, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” Arise, in faith and trust, knowing that God will give life to our mortal bodies through the spirit who dwells in us and among us. We are not slaves to the flesh. God has made us to be instruments of self-giving love, who find life by giving it away. As God has invested in us, we are free to invest ourselves in ministry to others. Praise God!

***GLORIA: Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat two more times.)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

SCRIPTURE LESSONS

OLD TESTAMENT: Ezekiel 37:1-14

From “The Message”

Breath of Life

37 ¹⁻² God grabbed me. God’s Spirit took me up and set me down in the middle of an open plain strewn with bones. He led me around and among them—a lot of bones! There were bones all over the plain—dry bones, bleached by the sun.

³ He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “Master God, only you know that.”

⁴ He said to me, “Prophecy over these bones: ‘Dry bones, listen to the Message of God!’”

⁵⁻⁶ God, the Master, told the dry bones, “Watch this: I’m bringing the breath of life to you and you’ll come to life. I’ll attach sinews to you, put meat on your bones, cover you with skin, and breathe life into you. You’ll come alive and you’ll realize that I am God!”

⁷⁻⁸ I prophesied just as I’d been commanded. As I prophesied, there was a sound and, oh, rustling! The bones moved and came together, bone to bone. I kept watching. Sinews formed, then muscles on the bones, then skin stretched over them. But they had no breath in them.

⁹ He said to me, “Prophecy to the breath. Prophecy, son of man. Tell the breath, ‘God, the Master, says, Come from the four winds. Come, breath. Breathe on these slain bodies. Breathe life!’”

¹⁰ So I prophesied, just as he commanded me. The breath entered them and they came alive! They stood up on their feet, a huge army.

¹¹ Then God said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Listen to what they’re

saying: 'Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone, there's nothing left of us.'

¹²⁻¹⁴ "Therefore, prophesy. Tell them, 'God, the Master, says: I'll dig up your graves and bring you out alive—O my people! Then I'll take you straight to the land of Israel. When I dig up graves and bring you out as my people, you'll realize that I am God. I'll breathe my life into you and you'll live. Then I'll lead you straight back to your land and you'll realize that I am God. I've said it and I'll do it. God's Decree.'"

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 130 Page 709

EPISTLE LESSON: Romans 8:6-11

⁶ The attitude that comes from selfishness leads to death, but the attitude that comes from the Spirit leads to life and peace. ⁷ So the attitude that comes from selfishness is hostile to God. It doesn't submit to God's Law, because it can't. ⁸ People who are self-centered aren't able to please God.

⁹ But you aren't self-centered. Instead you are in the Spirit, if in fact God's Spirit lives in you. If anyone doesn't have the Spirit of Christ, they don't belong to him. ¹⁰ If Christ is in you, the Spirit is your life because of God's righteousness, but the body is dead because

of sin. ¹¹ If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your human bodies also, through his Spirit that lives in you.

***GOSPEL LESSON: John 11:1-45**

Lazarus is ill

¹¹ A certain man, Lazarus, was ill. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (² This was the Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped his feet with her hair. Her brother Lazarus was ill.) ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, saying, "Lord, the one whom you love is ill."

⁴ When he heard this, Jesus said, "This illness isn't fatal. It's for the glory of God so that God's Son can be glorified through it." ⁵ Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. ⁶ When he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was. After two days, ⁷ he said to his disciples, "Let's return to Judea again."

⁸ The disciples replied, "Rabbi, the Jewish opposition wants to stone you, but you want to go back?"

⁹ Jesus answered, "Aren't there twelve hours in the day? Whoever walks in the day doesn't stumble because they see the light of the world. ¹⁰ But

whoever walks in the night does stumble because the light isn't in them."

¹¹ He continued, "Our friend Lazarus is sleeping, but I am going in order to wake him up."

¹² The disciples said, "Lord, if he's sleeping, he will get well." ¹³ They thought Jesus meant that Lazarus was in a deep sleep, but Jesus had spoken about Lazarus' death.

¹⁴ Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died. ¹⁵ For your sakes, I'm glad I wasn't there so that you can believe. Let's go to him."

¹⁶ Then Thomas (the one called Didymus) said to the other disciples, "Let us go too so that we may die with Jesus."

Jesus with Martha and Mary

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was a little less than two miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁹ Many Jews had come to comfort Martha and Mary after their brother's death. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, while Mary remained in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. ²² Even now I know that whatever you ask God, God will give you."

²³ Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴ Martha replied, "I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. ²⁶ Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷ She replied, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, God's Son, the one who is coming into the world."

²⁸ After she said this, she went and spoke privately to her sister Mary, "The teacher is here and he's calling for you." ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Jesus. ³⁰ He hadn't entered the village but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who were comforting Mary in the house saw her get up quickly and leave, they followed her. They assumed she was going to mourn at the tomb.

³² When Mary arrived where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died."

³³ When Jesus saw her crying and the Jews who had come with her crying also, he was deeply disturbed

and troubled. ³⁴ He asked, “Where have you laid him?”

They replied, “Lord, come and see.”

³⁵ Jesus began to cry. ³⁶ The Jews said, “See how much he loved him!” ³⁷ But some of them said, “He healed the eyes of the man born blind. Couldn’t he have kept Lazarus from dying?”

Jesus at Lazarus’ tomb

³⁸ Jesus was deeply disturbed again when he came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone covered the entrance. ³⁹ Jesus said, “Remove the stone.”

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said, “Lord, the smell will be awful! He’s been dead four days.”

⁴⁰ Jesus replied, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believe, you will see God’s glory?” ⁴¹ So they removed the stone. Jesus looked up and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me. ⁴² I know you always hear me. I say this for the benefit of the crowd standing here so that they will believe that you sent me.” ⁴³ Having said this, Jesus shouted with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his feet bound and his hands tied, and his face covered with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Untie him and let him go.”

⁴⁵ Therefore, many of the Jews who came with Mary and saw what Jesus did believed in him.

MESSAGE: “Can These Bones Live?”

This morning I’m going to tell you a story. I think it is pertinent to our scripture texts and to what is going on in our world today. Plus this is a true story. It was written by Rev. Erica MacCreaigh, pastor of Trinity United Presbyterian Church in Indianola, Iowa. I believe it was very brave of her to share it in the March edition of “The Christian Century”. My thoughts are in italics.

DISCLAIMER: *Rev. Erica’s “dry bones” may not be your experience. My “dry bones” are possibly not yours at all. Perhaps you have never had any type of disrupted experience, however you might in the future. The important part of this story is what God says and how we respond. A message for all of us.*

Erica begins by asking us, “has your life ever been so disrupted that you found yourself asking that question? Can these bones live?” *Personally, I feel many of us have been severely disrupted by what has been happening in our country’s capital. It seems that every day another rule or comment or statement or event comes out of our Capitol to turn the world of our politicians and our everyday lives upside down.*

Who is lying? Who is telling the truth? Who is looking out for the welfare of the common people in this country and who doesn't care what common people are suffering through? Just trying to be hopeful for an end to these depressing times can be exhausting.

Erica continues, "All of us who have passed through – or still inhabit – the valley of the shadows of abuse, addiction, displacement, divorce, financial catastrophe, chronic illness, terminal illness, mental illness, or death know what cataclysmic disruption looks like. We spend our days in survival mode. If we can find the energy to hope, we look forward to a day when we will be through the worst of it and feel like we can stand up and breathe on our own again.

Erica continues, "During the COVID pandemic, my marriage ended abruptly. I had to sell the dream house my spouse and I had purchased just four years earlier, my first pastorate ended badly, and I found myself in a temporary job in a town where I knew no one 800 miles from my family. I sank into prolonged depression. I fantasized feeling reconnected with humanity and safe in my own skin. Gradually, the weight and darkness began to lift. But I was surprised, emerging from the worst of it in 2024, to find myself not elatedly liberated but utterly

depleted. A pile of dry bones. I can't say I exactly asked, "Can these bones live?". My questions were more like, what do I do now? How am I supposed to even do anything? What if I never feel like doing anything ever again? I didn't have any energy left – I'd given everything I had to simply surviving.

Erica writes, "In the months after my emergence from the valley of death, I slept a lot. I scrolled a lot. I ate a lot of Oreos. These numbing mechanisms take the edge off but can become habitual. As habits, they sucked the life out of me, leaving me even drier. Dry bones, lifelessness, listlessness, alienation, abandonment – these things are barely survivable. How does anyone come back to life after them? I (Erica) can tell you from personal experience that self-motivated solutions don't always cut it. Dry bones don't resurrect themselves.

When the writer of Ezekial asks, "Can these bones live?" he is asking about the fate of the Jewish people. He uses dry bones as a metaphor for the anguish of a people who have suffered the horrors of siege, warfare, and exile. Dry bones represent national hopes crushed, religious faith shattered, social ties severed, economy in collapse and homes scorched and deserted.

BACK TO THE LIVING

“Into this desolation, these are the first words God gives Ezekial to speak to the bones:”O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.” “The operative word of the Lord in this week’s gospel lesson might seem to be, “Come forth!” But in my (Erica) experience, any such word from God did little to keep me engaged with life – sometimes through a phone call, often an uncannily well-timed text, occasionally a visit from out of state. For me, Jesus’ command to “unbind (Lazarus) and let him go was the call answered by others who brought me back to the land of the living.

Near the end of my wilderness wandering a friend took me to lunch and listened sympathetically as I bewailed my fate for about 40 minutes. When I was finished, she asked, “What makes it possible for you to keep your faith in God?” I had to think about that. Then I replied, “Not what, who. You make it possible. People like you, people who don’t give up on me. You give me hope that God still cares.

Can these bones live? Yes, by the voice and presence of the people of God bringing living water to a thirsty world. As Teresa of Aila famously observed. Christ has no body but ours, no hands or feet on earth but ours. Through our eyes Christ looks

upon the world with compassion. Upon our feet Christ walks to do good. And with our hands Christ blesses the world.

Erica adds, “To that I’d add that through our ears, Christ hears the cries of those who suffer, through our presence Christ companions the lost, and through our voices, Christ speaks the truth about the stubborn resiliency of the human spirit. Amen.
Pastor Rosemary

HYMN OF RESPONSE: 283 “Spirit of the Living God”

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Beginning with a time for personal silent prayer.

Gracious and ever faithful God, creator of all gifts to us that we don’t deserve. We praise and thank you for your love for us even when we don’t pay attention to the good works you do. Help us open our eyes to take in the beauty of your world. Open our ears to truly listen to those in need. Open our hearts to follow the love and forgiveness of our Savior and do likewise to all your children.

We gather today to pray for all who suffer from illness, pain, depression, feeling lost, and those who are grieving. May they see your compassionate love

and peace you have for them, dear God of all that is good.

Help all of us to be kinder to each other as we see and hear the needs of others; needs that we can provide; food, water, shelter, and companionship. We pray for those affected by the tornadoes last week and those families still without electricity.

We pray for all those who live in harm's way in many countries around the world. May their oppressors see that destroying places and people, leave nothing for them to feel victorious because they have destroyed. We pray for the families of our soldiers who died during this war that one man started.

We pray all these things in the name of the one who taught us to pray . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

PRAYER RESPONSE:

**"Remember me, Remember me,
O Jesus, Remember Me"**

INVITATION FOR GENEROSITY:

God invites us to view the valleys of dry bones that fill our world. Prophecy to these bones and say to

them: O dry bones, hear the word of God. We here offer ourselves and our resources that the winds of God might blow through our world with life-giving energy.

OFFERTORY: "Were You There" arranged by Phillip Keveren

***DOXOLOGY:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.**

***UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

Lift us up, O God, from the graves of our self-interest as we invest ourselves in sharing the good news with the world. Increase our gifts of time and treasure, that all who are drained of hope might have their minds set on the Spirit. May the Spirit raise them to new life as we celebrate the resurrection Jesus promised to Lazarus and to all who trust and follow where God leads. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN: 284 "Joys Are Flowing Like a River"

COMMISSION AND BLESSING:

ONE: We are freed from all that has bound us. The Spirit sends us out in trust and joy.

**MANY: The Spirit dwells in us and empowers us.
The light of Christ will show us the way.**

ONE: As you walk in the light, you will not stumble. With trust in God, you will live, even in death.

MANY: God is attentive to our prayers. We are assured of God's forgiveness and grace.

ONE: Go out to proclaim God's freeing love. Spread a word of hope to all who are in distress.

**Many: With God, there is great power to redeem.
We eagerly share God's steadfast love. Amen.
Amen!**

BENEDICTION RESPONSE: 571

**"O God of Love, O God of Peace" First verse only
O God of love, O God of peace,
Make wars throughout the world to cease.
The wrath of human wrong restrain;
Give peace, O God, give peace again!**

THE BELL IS RUNG:

POSTLUDE: "To God Be the Glory" by William Doane

