

Sermon for 22 March 2026 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Scriptures: Ezekiel 38:1-14; Psalter: Page 848, Psalm 130 ; Romans 8 :6-11 ; John 11 :1-45

Sermon: The images are piling up. Ezekiel, prophet and priest, lives and leads and writes, first through the threat of invasion and then through its result, which not only includes the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem where God is supposed to dwell and communicate, but the evacuation of all the leaders and major families of Israel, to dwell, hundreds of miles away in Babylonia, for generations..

That's where we get this spooky, unforgettable dream of the dry bones.

That's how things are supposed to work out and get better ... maybe not in our time, but in our children's and grandchildren's time.

Then Psalm 130 leads us in one of the most memorable of the song/spiritual/memory verse mixtures that we've used over the centuries in language after language when things are awful RIGHT NOW and we can hold on enough to get dressed and take our medicine or whatever dodge and run seems wisest for this moment of our eternity.

Then, zooming down into the first century A.D., we listen to Paul teach us it's a mind-over-matter thing, to put it crudely: You better use your imagination and figure out how to get over everything from pain and loss to growing into better being and doing ... Spirit is everything, body(flesh) is not the answer that matters.

Then you settle down again for a long Jesus story, this time so close to what really happens to Jesus soon enough that we don't even explain this soap opera kind of family tale for very long, except it does come back to haunt us after Jesus really does die and disappear and come back and spiritually surround and renew and recreate our outlook and everything else that matters.... so that here we are, trying to stick to the script and learn how to love and grow and make something out of every Sunday worship good enough to keep us alive and at least partly kind and seriously useful to each other and our bit of the rest of the world and time...

Lent tells the same old story, but it does have some highlights that work mighty wonders during all the rest of the year, and the years that this creation surrounds us with, thanks be to God.

Let us pray. Jesus, we 're just getting acquainted. We think we're your kind of people, but over and over we find out you are so much more human, so much wiser and more patient and loving and permanently trustworthy than we turn out to be again and again. Thank you. Show us stuff we never thought about doing to help all kinds of folks who surround us, and all those who show up just when we have something they need that we forgot about learning or loving enough to share, when we thought it was only for us... Pull us loose from all the fear and anger that come so easily. And, Lord, please work on seeing how like the folks whom we can't stand, or used to love but now think are so mistaken orand Jesus, thanks for scaring us into moments of joy when we least expected them, coming from the worst examples in our class or office or in our past... Love on, live on within and around and up ahead, as far as we can ever stretch and into the future we're learning to trust because you're the most human, and most Godly, person and fact we know and need. Amen.