

Homily
McCarter Presbyterian Church
5th Sunday in Lent
03-29-30

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Romans 8:6-11 NRSV

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. 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.

Breath of God

When we pastors plan out the message of God's Word for our sermon each week, we go through a routine: considering various scriptures, the actions and tragedies and joys that surround us, the particular portion of our church calendar, and often concerns that apply to individuals in the community or this particular community of faith. Personally, I really lean on the *Revised Common Lectionary*, a source for telling about God throughout the church year, with special emphasis on the seasons we celebrate, such as **Lent**.

Normally, in this process I emphasize either the **New Testament** or the **Old Testament** scripture selection as the theme for a sermon. But, today our service is intentionally shorter due these times of intentional separation and safeguards for our health. In fact, we are **assembled in the parking lot** instead of gathering for worship in the sanctuary. In addition, these particular scriptures are interwoven with one another, even though they were recorded about differing political and religious events that were several hundred years apart. So, with these things in mind we will deal nearly equally with:

- Those **dry bones**- and what is behind this wonderful story in *Ezekiel*, and-
- The earnest **instruction of Paul**, much along the same lines in relationship with God.

This story in *Ezekiel* is both interesting and engaging, because of the images it creates in our minds. It's a dialogue- dominated by God, certainly. But, it also is a form of **creation**: new life from old things. And, the **prophet** creates these stark images, beginning with this enormous mound of dried human bones. Without repeating every step in the many verses in Chapter 37, we finally have miraculously rebuilt human bodies. But, **something is lacking**.

Theses newly created forms come to life with God's Breath, which in Hebrew is a very special word: *ruach*. This word is more than breath: It is LIFE itself. It is the same **breath of God** that brought life to Adam in Eden. Now, at God's command, it creates new persons to repopulate and **restore Israel**.

Now, we have a setting for Paul to reflect on God's gift of life and breath and God's very presence with us. Paul knows that the mission of Jesus Christ was **reform** of the Jewish religion: bringing attention to those **in need**, encouraging sincere and genuine worship and **dedication to God**, and looking beyond the restrictions of the **Laws of Moses** and its many variations to the love, mercy, and **grace of God**.

In his letter to the church in Rome, the **apostle Paul** was writing to a group of **strangers** whom he had never met. In Rome, theses believers in Christ came together as the new religion **spread from Jerusalem**. Paul wanted to insure that they realized that the **Jewish religion** contributed significantly to the beliefs and worship in the early church. He also brought a **depth of understanding** of the new faith that made him the leading theologian among the founders of the church. And, as he discussed these essential things, Paul explains to us this concept of the Spirit, which in Greek is a different word: *pneuma*. Paul knows that this is the same Greek word used to replace the Hebrew word, *ruach*, when the Greek scholars translated the Hebrew Scriptures into the language of the day: Greek. And, Paul used it with this Hebrew meaning of breath, wind, and the essence of **life itself**:

All of these elements of *pneuma* and *ruach* are aspects of the **Living God**. So, through Paul we now have this knowledge that this is God's intent: for each of us to understand this significant aspect of God and **God's Spirit**. But, how can it apply to you and me? How do these words help us: Breath + Spirit ?

It is not that difficult if we think of our own **breathing**: It is natural, not forced. And yet, the **first breath** each of us takes came from God. It is the turning point in a child's condition **at birth**. Everyone in the delivery room waits for that newborn to take in air for the first time. When it happens, everyone rejoices throughout the delivery room. If it doesn't happen, it's a full-blown emergency and the professionals work as only they can to save the newborn at this **critical time**.

In this same sense, Paul is telling us that **God remains** present with us, even in times of emergency, such as we have swirling around us now. And, when we believe in God through Jesus Christ we know that the Spirit, the **Breath of God**, is with us. And, Paul specifically tells us that that same Spirit is also **within us**. And, that is even more clear through the lens we have on God and on the world through **Jesus Christ**: seeing and experiencing God so clearly and participating in **God's Spirit** in everything we do and in **each breath** we take.

On this **5th Sunday in Lent** with all the chaos that surrounds us and the threats to our health and even our existence in this reality of time and space, we have the **assurance** of God in Jesus Christ: And, that is the Breath of God that surrounds us and **remains** with us and **within us** always!