Dec. 10, 2017 Ezekiel: Valley of Dry Bones Ezekiel 37:1-14 (John 11:25-26) Liturgical color: Blue PRAYER OF THE DAY **God of breath, You promised new life to your people in exile by breathing into a valley full of dry bones. Breathe new life into us, so that we might live passionately for you. Amen.**

HYMNS The word of God is source and seed ELW 506 Awake, O sleeper, rise from death ELW 452 CHORAL There shall a star, Felix Mendelssohn

Announcements Prayers

Music Ministry Appreciation Marie Pfeiffer, Bill Heffinger, Ann Faust, Ed Pieller

Welcome Basically Brass

Cookie Walk, Vespers family and friends of Barbara Wenrich in grief

B-fast (Mini-thon, 4 diamonds pediatric cancer research)

GOSPEL: John 11:25 Jesus said to [Martha], "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

28 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." 29 And when she heard it, she [Mary] got up quickly and went to him.

30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

Children’s Sermon: Dem Bones – Advent #2

*Antler… beaver skull? Bones into Ezekiel box*

**Passing of Peace** with **thanks** to all musicians and musically appreciative

Sam & Bonnie Thomas shelf – dedicate?

Ron & Andy adding lighting for organ ‘behind the pipes and behind the scenes’

~~In news coverage a reporter spoke with a firefighter about the conditions in N California… well they had been able to shorten the shifts from 48 to 24 hours for each person. There’s tired then there’s firefighter-tired. Bone weary.~~

O come, O come, Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel… that mourns in lowly exile here… These people are mourning, lamenting to their very core… to their bones

* “O LORD, heal me, for my **bones** are shaking with terror.” Psalm 6:2
* “ all my **bones** are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted…” Ps 22:14

Their resolve, and their physical foundation reduced to nothing… yearning for God with us, Emmanuel. Not only captive Israel… but now captive Judah too, there has been a siege, and starvation, and city fortification in rubble, we’ve seen destruction like large scale and personally.

If you have ever grieved the death of a loved one… this sermon will start-out very painfully, with the pain of death that goes beyond my vocabulary… but don’t let go, God’s got a reason for you to hold on!

Many of us have wept at a grave-site, some very recently… all deeply moved as the person with whom we loved and laughed was reduced to a box, or ashes, and placed in the ground. Bones are a very real part of who we are as humans thus they are also an unmistakable symbol of deepest grief… psalmists use the image of bones to lament – to mourn, to cry-out from the deepest pain in a human heart… as only arts such as this music and poetry can portray:

* “Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my **bones** waste away.” Ps 31:9-10

Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, and Isaiah, and Elijah and so many others… has good reason to lament. They lament the wrongs that God’s chosen people have chosen to follow, and lament the consequences that God uses to correct very poor behavior of those who are identified as followers of God.

We’ve heard for a few weeks now, how God’s chosen people living in what is now modern-day Israel strayed from following God; and after generations of warnings, along –with 2nd, 3rd, and 4th chances… came the Consequences! First the **Northern** kingdom called Israel was destroyed by God’s elected Punishers, the Assryians in 722, taking exiles one-direction, away through modern-day Syria and Iraq; that was the end of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Then although God’s remaining chosen ones had gotten the message to clean-up their lives and worship One God, living with norms based on justice not greed. God’s people ignored all those messages:

* What does it take to change a culture of greed to one of equal rights for all?
* How far does God need to go to ensure that justice is the rule of law rather than special interests?

Well, it takes more than Assyrians, so about 150 years later… The Babylonians, empowered by God, came around 600BC and took the brightest and the best from Jerusalem and the surrounding **Southern** kingdom of Judah. Forcing them to walk hundreds of miles, hooked like fish on a line, to cities in modern-day Iraq … people like Daniel, Rack (Shadrach), Shack (Meshack) and Benny (Abednego)… **and** Ezekiel, who was a priest and a prophet.

Still the remaining leaders, did NOT amend their ways… one can imagine the LORD God of Hosts, bone weary at this ignorance, this stubborn determination of free will humans living as if there is no reason to Fully Rely On God. These people, our not-so-God-fearing ancestors, learned to put God first the hard way… the Babylonians came back again for the remnant in 586 BC, **completely** destroying the Temple, the cities, the walls, the vineyards, the fields, the lives, communities, the will of the people, including hopes and dreams… seemingly even the Promise of the Promised Land… and almost everyone else was taken on that long march to modern-day Iraq and Iran. Only those labeled most frail, and ‘useless’ were left behind in the ruins. These were not military losses measured in hours, days and weeks, whole groups of people lost in a flash like Pearl Harbor or Nagasaki or Hiroshima… no these were long slow brutal months, years.

There were plenty who would not survive these harsh marches, these age-old Trails of Tears, versions of ancient Concentration Camp practices, … people could have easily envisioned a valley full of dry skeletons, piles of bones long dead. Remnants of lives that had fallen apart completely, nothing left to hold these individuals nor their communities together. So Ezekiel’s vision was easy to imagine for the people of God who were finally listening… this vision summed-up the conditions for those who had once called Israel or Judah home. Mortal, do you think these bones can live?

‘Heck no.’ They are long-past-dead, long-past the point of any hope… only the arid dessert conditions keeps these bones recognizable rather than turning them to dust mingled with the sands of time. …And yet God has a different answer. Mortal, do you think these bones can live? … Ezekiel has obviously encountered God’s amazing grace before… “O LORD God, you know.”

Yet again God brings something out of nothing. Here again, God who is in the midst of punishing his beloved human creations for terrible behavior… gives a prophet, a message of hope, a small comfort… not for the present, but hope for the future, to carry the people through the present agonizing pain… again this week we discover that within that 70 years where God wasn’t going to listen to the laments of these ‘followers’… God is still present, and at work! Bringing life where none seems remotely possible! And God speaks through the prophet to those who are good as dead; and tells them to… {*sing*?} ‘hear the word of the LORD. Dem bones gonna Walk around!’

As we hear Ezekiel tell of the **vision**, not a literal resurrection, but rather the vision of one. Ezekiel delivers to the people exiled in a foreign land, the people whom the LORD calls “dry bones”… a vivid description of bones coming together with clacking, and sinews, holding these bones together in balance, encased in flesh and skin… all ready to live, but… not yet there… a reverse demolition, **reconnecting** all that the children of God had broken individually and disconnected communally for hundreds of years… the LORD God responded with a vision **constructing** the miracle that is the human body, over and over and over. Not un-doing the death, but rather taking what was completely broken, unfixable, and fashioning a **new** creation! A new multitude numerous as the stars… a timeless divine gift of bringing life from a place beyond the deepest grief and death itself. A Life we today are still singing about, now for us this is a new life in Christ! A thrilling voice is sounding!

This new creation has been an on-going theme that the Holy Spirit has brought here recently to this sanctuary powerfully, this week as we heard God’s word of new creation in the context of Barbara’s memorial service, and last week as Linda joined this congregation as a new member… and 2 months ago when Brother Richard eloquently spoke of how the brokenness of addiction leads to a death of the old self and a new life, in a new creation… so blessed when people give that new creation, that renewed person a 2nd chance to live that new life.

Not only individuals are new creations with the Life-giving spirit of God… whole nations, even whole congregations… who might be fighting-for-life, or even feeling dead, facing deficits, wondering how we got to this point which is not what we expected nor hoped for… not the ideal we envisioned… yes, even nations and congregations can be resurrected by the Spirit of God. Notice… not resuscitated… not the exact same way of functioning, not filling ‘what-we’ve always done’ with just enough life-support to function… no, there is a death, a change, a loss to grieve… Jerusalem was leveled. The northern kingdom never came into being again. But still God was not entirely finished. There was a new creation. The exiles (some of their future generations returned to rebuild…, there is a new creation.

As we read scripture from thousands of years ago… we too are moved by the Spirit of God, we too are given hope in the Word… we too may be able to envision being a dry bone, drawn in a new direction, connected for a purpose, that purpose fleshed-out with a vast multitude around… all being connected, all being re-purposed… and then… hearing the divine Creator’s ultimate promise… I WILL put breath into you AND you shall live again AND you shall know that I AM the LORD!

In the vision the WORD of God came to be, and took on flesh… so that those that were lost may be found, those that were dead may have a new life… and those dry dead bones not only came to life in that vision… ‘Dem Bones stood on their feet! Ready for marching orders, Ready to listen for a Thrilling voice; Dem Bones stood ready to “hear the Word of the LORD…” AND follow it! Are we listening?