

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you O God, my strength and my joy... Amen.

A thick smoke filled the sky choking out the sun. The clouds, if there were any could not be spotted...

The air was heavy and stale, smelling of rancid smoke. With gray and white pieces of ash floating down, filling lawns with specks so delicate and fine it looked like snow precariously balancing on blades of grass.

The days dragged on like this, and if one were to venture outside, your eyes would immediately burn and breathing would become labored.

I was living in Vancouver Washington on my internship when smoke from forest fires surrounded the city for weeks, as a strange weather front kept the smoke from escaping. Creating a space that had the worst air quality in the world.

A place so dry and desolate that if the smoke would have persisted for years, I imagine it would have reflected the valley of dry bones that Ezekiel foretold...

As the valley of dry bones was so dry, it could not have happened overnight...

Because to become this dry, parched, and crumpled, would take years...

A transition that many people can relate to, even if you have never experienced smoke-filled days from fires...

As most humans, especially those of us living in America, endure something equally dangerous that takes years to compound... Burnout, and fatigue...

Because we often do not even realize how worn-out we are, until we crumble.

And when we finally do crumble, we find ourselves dried out and at a loss for words...

And then there are the opposite, yet equally traumatizing moments in life, when words are not enough...

The moments when in an instant your world is turned upside down...

A horrific car accident, a terminal diagnosis, the death of a loved one.

The moments of life-shattering grief...

A moment that is so fresh it hurts deeply and immediately. Tearing into your world like a bolt of lightning, too hard to ignore.

Moments that even Jesus experienced...

As we heard in our moving gospel today with Lazarus's death...

When Jesus entered the very human experience of what it means to lose a loved one.

A moment that forever changed God...

As we heard that Jesus became deeply disturbed... Illustrating that God is capable of experiencing emotions just like you.

Revealing that God is not someplace out there... But God is a part of you.

Because it is in our bodies, in our breath, and in our tears, where we are deeply connected to God...

As I shared in my very first service here, the original Hebrew word for God was made up of syllables that sound like our breath, the sound we make when we breathe in followed by the sound we make when we breathe out...

Further, the Hebrew word for breath is Ruach... And Ruach has a much more expansive meaning than one's breath...

Ruach means breath, life, and spirit. Spirit referring to both your spirit and the Holy Spirit.

Showing how intricate breath truly is and how each breath is weaved into God's very existence.

Which is something we were able to see in the valley of dry bones...

When God weaved sinew and flesh on them. When God breathed life into them and filled them with the Spirit of God.

However, the valley stayed dry... God did not alter the landscape, but God was present in the dryness and God brought life into dryness, leading them out of the valley, and back home to the promise land...

And God continues to be faithful in that way for you. As God breathes with you inviting newness and life into your exhausted bones.

God breathes with you in your deepest valleys, even when there is no immediate way out.

Because God knows what it is like to be in those places, for God lived, in the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ.

Where Christ experienced pain and loss. Not so that he could eradicate them from the world, but so that he could be present with us in our hard times.

Which is why, I think Jesus stayed for 2 days before going to meet Lazarus... Jesus was grieving and he needed that space.

Because life is hard sometimes and it is difficult to face the things that bring us pain.

And for many of you, this hits very close to home, as there have been a lot of deaths recently in this community...

Losses of loved ones, whose imprint has left a hole in your life... Impacting the way you live, how you move, and how you breathe.

And as much as I hope and pray to walk alongside of you, to find the right words, to provide comfort, and the good news of God in our midst...

I know that I will fall short... That these are the times when words are not enough...

And Christ knows this too... As we heard in our gospel... When Christ was deeply moved, he did not use words... He began to weep.

Not to eliminate grief... But to meet us in our grief.

As our tears unite with Christ's tears... Where Christ grieves not only the loss of Lazarus, but for all of your loved ones.

Providing you a space to be held in God's embrace, and to breathe with the Spirit of God.

The Spirit breathes new life in you so you can find the strength to move forward, even if the strength is subtle... As we tread step by step or inch by inch into the world.

As we cling to the promise that Christ is the resurrection and the life, and that death no longer has the final word.

And yet, this does not eliminate your pain... Especially when you find yourself in a dark tomb like Lazarus... When you hear your name being called, to get up, but it is too hard to move because your arms and feet feel bound...

And it does not eliminate your exhaustion... When your sinews are stretched, and your bones are aching.

And yet, God is there too... God may not immediately transform the valley around you, but God can transform the breath inside you.

Because God is intricately intertwined into every sinew, every breath, and every tear.

God is there calling your name... To take your hand and lead you...

To be with you when you are weak, and worn. To hold space for you when words are not enough.

To lead you on this path of life, through dry valleys, storms, and strife, till you meet God in the resurrected life.

But until then God is with you, breath by breath and step by step... As God knows the very intricacies of your very being. Because God has got you...

Holding space for your tears, fears, and joys. God has got you... and holds you in God's love... Amen