

Weekly News from Johnsville United Methodist Church

*6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.
(1 Peter 5: 6)*



March 26, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In order to keep everyone as safe as possible, and respect the directives of our Bishop and Governor, we will not meet in our building until May 3rd. The Bishop's letter is enclosed in this communication. It is hoped that things will be returning to a sense of normal by that date.

Each week, a devotional and sermon will be sent out via email. If you know of anyone who has email who is not receiving this communication, please email the office at stpaulnewwindsor@gmail.com, so that we may update the email list. In order to keep as many connected as possible, we will mail some copies.

Let us all keep focused on our Lord and Savior. God is in charge. We must keep our trust and devotion in our Triune God. As we continue in the season of Lent, let us challenge ourselves to spend a little extra time in prayer each day. The world is in need of prayer warriors.

I miss you all. As I talk with you over the phone, I hear how much we miss one another. When this all lifts, we will celebrate and worship together again.

In Christian love,

Pastor Shari

Johnsville United Methodist Church

Union Bridge, MD

Our mission is to nurture the members of the congregation in developing a personal relationship with God and to share His word and His love with the larger community.

PRAISE, WORSHIP AND CELEBRATION

Fifth Sunday of Lent-March 29, 2020

WELCOME

*Opening Hymn

“Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above”

UMH 126

1. Sing praise to God
who reigns above,
the God of all creation,
the God of power,
the God of love,
the God of our salvation.

With healing balm my soul is filled
and every faithless murmur stilled:
To God all praise and glory.

2. The Lord is never far away,
but through all
grief distressing,
an ever present
help and stay,
our peace and
joy and blessing.

As with a mother's tender hand,
God gently leads the chosen band:
To God all praise and glory.

3. Thus, all my
toilsome way along,
I sing aloud thy praises,
that earth may hear
the grateful song
my voice
unwearied raises.

Be joyful in the Lord, my heart,
both soul and body bear your part:
To God all praise and glory.

4. Let all who name
Christ's holy name
give God all
praise and glory;
let all who own
his power proclaim
aloud the wondrous story!

Cast each false idol from its throne,
for Christ is Lord, and Christ alone:
To God all praise and glory.

***Call to Worship**

Leader: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Open your heart to the Spirit of hope.

People: Like someone in the darkness we will look for the first light of dawn.

***Opening Prayer**

God of our yesterdays, our todays, and our tomorrows, we are too prone to live for the moment, to let our health and our emotions and our passions rule our lives. You offer us the Spirit to bring these things into wholeness under your control, but we resist and often are overtaken by events and sink into despair. From the depths you would raise us, if we cry out to you, but at times it seems we prefer sullen silence. Forgive self-pity that closes you out. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Leader: Friends, hear the Good News! In the Lord is love unfailing, and great is His power to set us free.

People: God alone sets us free from all our sins.

Leader: Friends, believe the Good News!

People: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord of Life, we come to you consumed by our worry and our pain. The uncertainty of our world has many of us in a place of ill-rest. We wonder where you are at times, and blame you for not being there in our need, forgive us. When we turn away from you in moments of loss, guide us back into your faithful arms. For we long to put our faith in your promised healing. We yearn to truly believe that you are the resurrection and the life. Teach us more Merciful One, that you weep, when we weep, and rejoice as we find our way home. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

*Hymn

“Spirit of the Living God”

UMH 393

Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.

Melt me, mold me,
Fill me, use me.
Spirit of the loving God,
Fall afresh on me.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalter (Psalm 130)

UMH 848

RESPONSE In my distress I cry to the Lord: “Deliver me, O Lord.”

ONE: ¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! Lord, hear my voice!

ALL: ² Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

ONE: ³ If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

ALL: ⁴ But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be worshiped.

ONE: ⁵ I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, in the Lord’s word I hope.

ALL: ⁶ my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

ONE: ⁷ O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, with the Lord is plenteous redemption.

ALL: ⁸ And the Lord will redeem Israel from all iniquities.

RESPONSE In my distress I cry to the Lord: “Deliver me, O Lord.”

Hebrew Scripture Lesson Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD." ⁷So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from

the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. ¹¹Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' ¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act," says the LORD.

Leader: This is the word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God!

Sermon

"Dry Bones"

Pastor Shari McCourt

The book of Ezekiel is believed to have been written by a priest and prophet called Ezekiel. He was exiled during the Babylonian captivity after King Nebuchadnezzar's siege over Jerusalem in 598-597 B.C. They were held captive south of Babylonian on the Chebar River, one of the tributary canals of the Euphrates River.

Ezekiel was given extraordinary visions that often left him overwhelmed. He was told by the Spirit of God that he would have periods of time when he would not be able to talk to anyone except to utter prophecies. He practiced prophetic symbolic acts, which must have appeared strange to those around him. He was interpreted as a curiosity when his wife died and he did not mourn her death according to the custom of the time. He was unable to mourn in according to the custom, because he saw her death in symbolic terms as it expressed the destruction of God's sanctuary in Jerusalem. We don't know how Ezekiel died but it is assumed that he died during the exile.

The today's text is a salvation oracle which begins with the hand of God through God's Spirit picking up our main character and placing him a valley of full of **dry bones**.

The Spirit took Ezekiel all around the valley so that he could see the vast destruction of the people of Israel. He noticed that the bones were lying in a battlefield where those slain did not receive a proper burial. The bones were so dry that the birds and other creatures had already picked the last cells of life off of them. They were brittle **dry bones!** The Spirit said to Ezekiel, "Mortal, can these bones live?" He answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴Then the Spirit said to him, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O **dry bones**, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I will lay

sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD."

So Ezekiel prophesied as God has told him. Suddenly, there was this noise of **dry bones, dry bones, dry bones** coming together bone to **dry bone**. He watched as tendons strung across the **dry bones**. Then flesh began to fill in between the bones and tendons. Skin began to cover the humanlike figures, but they were not human until God spoke to Ezekiel again and said, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

Ezekiel did as God's Spirit commanded him to do. This tremendous rush of wind came from the four directions of the earth. Like in the creation story from Genesis the Spirit of God the *ruah* breathed the breath of life and filled the empty humanlike vessels until they had life. There were many a great multitude.

The Spirit of God spoke to Ezekiel, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' ¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel.

In the midst of total despair God is ever present, powerful, sovereign and able to use any situation for a higher purpose. God is clear to Ezekiel what that purpose is. God spoke, ¹³And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act,"

God is so powerful that God can resuscitate decomposed bodies and bring fourth life from total destruction. This is a story of hope for God's people for all time, then and now. Even when things look grim, God is still in control of the situation and has the ability to turn things around to life.

In only two weeks we will be celebrating Easter, the celebration of Jesus victory over death through the resurrection. Soon will we read the story of the passion of Christ to remind us of God's gift of unfailing grace upon grace for God's people. Even in the midst of humanity's disobedience, and our disobedience, God's love for us never fails. Through Gods' grace there is hope in all situations. God's love is for all of God's children. This is a day for new beginnings! A time to remember and move on, time to believe what love is bringing, and laying to rest grudges. Christ is alive, and goes before us to show, and share, what love can do. This is a day for new beginnings. Our God is making all things new. I hope that we will take time to be still, pray, and

rededicate ourselves to our Lord and Savior today and every day of our lives. May we be one in Him! Amen.

OFFERING OF OUR GIFTS TO GOD AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP

As an act of worship, please consider keeping current in your tithes and offerings. Even though the church building is closed, we still have financial obligations we need to meet. The mailbox will be checked daily. The address is: Johnsville United Methodist Church, 11106 Green Valley Road, Union Bridge, MD 21791

*Closing Hymn

“This Is a Day of New Beginnings”

UMH 383

1. This is a day
of new beginnings,
time to remember
and move on,

time to believe
what love is bringing,
laying to rest
the pain that’s gone.

2. For by the life
and death of Jesus,
God’s mighty Spirit,
now as then,

can make for us
a world of difference,
as faith and hope
are born again.

3. Then let us,
with the Spirit’s daring,
step from the past
and leave behind

our disappointment
guilt and grieving,
seeking new paths,
and sure to find.

4. Christ is alive,
and goes before us
to show and share
what love can do.

This is a day
of new beginnings;
our God is making
All things new.

5. In faith we’ll gather
round the table
to taste and share
what love can do.

This is a day
of new beginnings;
our God is making
All things new.

Baltimore-Washington Conference

e-connection

March 25, 2020

Building restrictions continued through April 26

As the coronavirus pandemic continues, churches in the Baltimore-Washington Conference have been responding in extraordinary ways as they live out the call to be the presence of Christ in their communities. Within the Baltimore-Washington Conference, the physical and spiritual well-being of every person is our focus.

On Monday, March 23, Gov. Larry Hogan of Maryland issued an executive order directing the closure of non-essential businesses. Mayor Muriel Bowser of the District of Columbia issued an order on Tuesday, March 24, also ordering the closure of non-essential businesses as of March 25. Effective Tuesday, March 24, West Virginia Governor Jim Justice issued a stay-at-home order for residents of that state.

Given the continuing gravity of these orders and in keeping with directives from local governments to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, **Bishop LaTrelle Easterling directs churches throughout the BWC to refrain from gathering in their buildings through Sunday, April 26.** Exceptions include essential ministries to the community as outlined by local governments, such as food distribution and daycare, as long as they can meet CDC health requirements ([see FAQs](#)).

Barring changes from local governments, the first Sunday for resumption of worship in our buildings will be May 3, 2020. The staff and leadership of the BWC continues to work to provide resources for congregations to provide vital ministries in these challenging times. Online resources for Palm Sunday and Easter are being planned. [Resources for local churches](#) to continue in ministry during this crisis may be found on the BWC website.

Conference camps are closed through April 26. The BWC Mission Center in Fulton also remains closed. Conference staff are teleworking.

Bishop Easterling and the Cabinet are meeting online and have resumed the appointment-making process. Every step of the appointment process is able to be faithfully accomplished using technology while observing the governmental restrictions. Several [new appointments](#) will be announced in worship settings on Sunday and online Monday, March 30.

As the days pass, may we continue to work together, connected as one, lifting each other and all the world in prayer as we move through this uncertain season, anxious and yet confident that God is with us.