

## SCRIPTURE READING FOR MARCH 26, 2023 @ CAPC OAKLAND

### LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

**Ezekiel** is acknowledged as a Hebrew prophet and the 6th-century BCE author of the Book of Ezekiel, which reveals prophecies regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, and the restoration to the land of Israel.

The name Ezekiel means "God is strong" or "God strengthens". It's believed that Ezekiel served as prophet during the time up to and through the fall of Jerusalem, over a course of about 22 years, starting in 593 BCE.

*The hand of the Lord came upon me* :: This is a common phrase for introducing a prophetic word or vision.

*in the middle of a valley*:: Under the hand of God, Ezekiel is carried in the spirit to a valley filled with a great many dry bones. Although it is not named, its identification as "the" valley suggests a particular place; other clues suggest a battlefield. As such, it evokes ancient Near Eastern curses threatening treaty violators not only with wholesale destruction but also with leaving the slain unburied for carrion prey to devour.

In this one grim scene, then, we are reminded of all that has transpired since Ezekiel was first summoned to speak to the rebellious house of Israel. From the time Ezekiel first began to speak in 592 BCE, the people's long history of rebellion against God and now also against Nebuchadnezzar has sealed their fate. Destruction was inevitable, and by 586 BCE Jerusalem lay in ruins. Whether we are to think of this battlefield as Nebuchadnezzar's doing or God's, we are to remember a broken covenant and unspeakable loss.

*breath*:: In both Greek (*pneumos*) and Hebrew (*ruach*) this word means breath, spirit, and wind. It's only by the context that one can know which is intended.

### Ezekiel 37:1-14 NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

<sup>1</sup> *The hand of the Lord came upon me [Ezekiel], 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.* <sup>2</sup> He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. <sup>3</sup> He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." <sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. <sup>5</sup> Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup> I 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."

<sup>7</sup> So 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. <sup>8</sup> I 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. <sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, "Prophecy 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." <sup>10</sup> I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

<sup>11</sup> Then 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.' <sup>12</sup> Therefore 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. <sup>13</sup> And you shall know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup> I 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."

### John 11:11-45 NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

<sup>11</sup> After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." <sup>12</sup> The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." <sup>13</sup> Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. <sup>14</sup> Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup> For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." <sup>16</sup> Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

<sup>17</sup> When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, <sup>19</sup> and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to

console them about their brother.<sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.<sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."<sup>22</sup> But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him."<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."<sup>24</sup> Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,<sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"<sup>27</sup> She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

<sup>28</sup> 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."<sup>29</sup> And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him.<sup>31</sup> The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.<sup>32</sup> When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.<sup>34</sup> He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."<sup>35</sup> Jesus began to weep.<sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"<sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.<sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days."<sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"<sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me.<sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me."<sup>43</sup> When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"<sup>44</sup> The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

<sup>45</sup> Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him.

#### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- Ezekiel witnesses the hope of God's life-giving Spirit in the midst of crisis and decay. Where do you find hope in our world today which is a sort of valley of dry bones?
- Jesus tells the crowd – the community gathered at the tomb – to unbind Lazarus. What might that mean...for him?; for them? .... for us today?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, as a church – to act, speak, be or change through this word of scripture?

#### LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

**John** is the fourth of the four gospels in the Second Testament. The gospels are the telling of the story of the life of Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings. John is most likely the last of the four to be written down as it contains a more developed theological content, and heavy use of metaphor. This story of the blind man who see and the seeing who are blind told only by John.

*I am the resurrection and the life.* :: One of the unique aspects of the gospel of John is that it contains "I am" statements by Jesus. In Hebrew the most holy name for God YHWH is a derivative of the expression "I am". The "I am" statements found in the Gospel of John are the bread of life (6:35), the light of the world (8:12; 9:5), the door (10:7), the good shepherd (10:11, 14), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the way the truth and the life (14:6) and the true vine (15:1).

**SIGNS**:: In the other three gospels what we would call miracles are called "miracles" or "works of power." In the gospel of John, they're called "signs" – possibly teasing out the reality that the point to more than just what they are as signs of what God is up to in Jesus.

The raising of Lazarus is the last of Jesus' "SIGNS" in the Gospel of John.