

## Online Weekly Worship

### Fifth Sunday in Lent – Sunday 29 March 2020

#### Introduction

Hello everyone, from the Church of Scotland and our National Worship Team. Our lives continue to change in ways we could not have imagined just weeks ago, including how we meet as a church and worship God. This is a time of physical distancing, but of social and spiritual solidarity. We are grateful to Sally Foster-Fulton of Christian Aid, Susan Brown of Dornoch Cathedral, and James Cathcart of Sanctuary First for leading this time of worship.

This worship is open to all and we hope that sharing together will be a blessing to you. There are moments where you are invited to join in at home, speaking the words in bold out loud or inside and singing along to the hymns. You might also like to pause and light a candle before we begin as a sign of setting this time aside for something special. We join together now with people across Scotland and around the world, and we begin by acknowledging that we are in God's presence.

## Call to worship

O Lord,  
We come before You as your people  
gathered together to worship.  
Hear our voices as we sing and pray  
and watch for You.  
We keep watch for You  
as those who wait aching for the morning.

In the midst of darkness  
**we wait for You**

in the midst of heartache  
**we wait for You**

in the midst of quietness  
**we wait for You**

in the midst of kindness  
**we wait for You**

in the midst of rekindled relationships  
**we wait for You**

in the midst of new possibilities  
**we wait for You**

as we long sincerely for the dawn  
**we wait for You.**

We gather together now to sing – trusting that God can hear each one of us and blend our distant voices into one song of worship.

## Song – CH4 189 “Be still”

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here;  
come bow before Him now with reverence and fear:  
in Him no sin is found – we stand on holy ground.  
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;  
He burns with holy fire with splendour He is crowned:  
how awesome is the sight – our radiant King of light!  
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;  
He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister His grace –  
no work too hard for Him. In faith receive from Him.  
Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.

## Prayer

Our souls wait and our bodies watch for the morning,  
and the world wakes up and the sun shines and the planet spins.  
Life goes on, even when we stand still.

Hopeful God,  
the Psalmist asks that when Your children cry, You be attentive.  
Ask the same of us.  
While we wait and watch, wake us up to each other and our common humanity.  
When we are alone, remind us to reach out –  
there are sisters and brothers next door and across the world  
who share our global neighbourhood.

Love breathes life into stale and stifled places,  
revives what has been worn to waste, reconnects what was deemed irrevocable.  
As we wait and watch, stand in the shadows with us.  
When we worry and fear, hold our hands and our hearts.  
When we lose those we love and who we are, come and find us.  
And when we walk on, lead the way.  
As You are there for us, may we be there for each other.  
Hear our voices as we join together,

saying the prayer that unites us wherever we wait ...

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be Your name,  
Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are Yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen**

## **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. He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord God, you know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 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.'

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. 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. 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.' I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

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." 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. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 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.'

## Reflection

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.

'You'll know it, when I do it.'

That's what the Lord tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the people – and it seems an audacious claim, so outrageous, in fact, that Ezekiel's response, when asked if it's possible, is a lukewarm-at-best, 'God knows.'

This is iconic sacred poetry and image – and it leaps off the page and smack-dab into our present local and global reality. This is an ancient vision and reassurance to a people in exile, whose symbol of their 'chosen' status, the Temple, has been demolished; whose leaders are in captivity and whose seat of power, Jerusalem, is occupied by Babylonian forces and in ruins. It is a dry, brittle, stark and obviously fragile reality.

And it is from this landscape that Ezekiel is led into a valley of dry bones.

'The hand of the Lord came upon me,' we hear. Well, that is another way of saying, 'I saw a vision of what might be'. Stronger than that even, 'I saw a vision of what already is, but is yet to be.'

And what is Ezekiel told?

Tell these bones – to find ways to come together/ to hold firm and build up as one body even when they've been scattered and dried and blown to the four winds.

And what is Ezekiel told?

Tell these bodies – to breathe in the love of God and then speak out, sing out, shout out to each other, even, especially when they're scattered and tired and afraid.

And what is Ezekiel told?

Tell this community that being human is only possible when we reach out to each other, even, especially when we are scattered and our individual lifestyle is challenged and we're asked to consider each other first because what we do has a direct impact on others. Stand and journey together, even when you don't recognise the valley.

'You'll know it, when I do it.'

That's what the Lord tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the people – and it seems an audacious claim – but can't you see it?

We know it is true when it takes place:

Signs of life: Babies are born, flowers bloom outside, children learn and run about and need us to listen to a thousand questions.

Offers of help: Neighbours we've never met put cards through our doors, say they'll pick up shopping, medication – loo roll, milk and a cake to cheer us up.

A call every day – 'get to know you' games on Facebook and Instagram / daily sanity calls to isolated people / virtual coffee breaks and pints / Sunday worship online that feels weird, but good.

Key workers stocking shelves and pharmacists filling prescriptions, posties and delivery people keeping the show on the road.

Doctors and nurses, health visitors, cleaners and porters and paramedics putting themselves at risk for us.

'You'll know it when I do it.' So thanks be to God for the tired bones that keep getting up, for the bodies who stand up and hold each other. For the communities who continue to be community, even when the valley is dry and different.

This kindness needs to be long-term and as certain as curious children and hungry families. The Coronavirus is hitting hard, and it hits the most vulnerable hardest. It brings into stark relief our inter-connectedness. I am reminded of an African saying – Ubuntu – the closest translation in English, 'I am because we are.' As we journey through this time and space together, let's hold onto that. We are one global family, so ...

Bones, strong and sinewed – click together.

Bodies, emboldened by the breath of the spirit – speak out for and sing out with each other.

Community, raised up in shared life, hold on and help out.

## **Song – CH4 619 “Spirit of the living God”**

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me;  
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me:  
break me, melt me: mould me, fill me.  
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Spirit of the living God, move among us all;  
make us one in heart and mind, make us one in love,  
humble, caring, selfless, sharing.  
Spirit of the living God, fill our lives with love.

## **Blessing**

In response to the beautiful words from Ezekiel about bones we are going to do a ‘Bone blessing’ together. I will be doing some simple movements with my arms and hands that you are invited to join in with. Our hope is that as we go from here we will do so with minds/muscles/and bones renewed for the week ahead.

Bone-maker, bone-shaker, bone-writer, bone-lighter, bone-gluer, bone renewer...  
Bless our bones

our weary bones [**ROLL SHOULDERS**]

our hunched bones [**HUNCH SHOULDERS**]

our tense bones [**FOLD ARMS**]

our restless bones. [**GENTLY SHAKE ARMS**]

Help us to discover new ways of reaching out [**REACH OUT**]

as we watch for the new ways You animate our bones **[STRETCH UP]**

the new ways you will enthuse and inspire us **[WRIGGLE FINGERS)**

Knit us together **[MESH FINGERS TOGETHER]**

bones and all **[CLOSE HANDS TOGETHER IN PRAYER AND HOLD TOGETHER UNTIL END OF BLESSING]**

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

May all God's people say: **Amen. [AMEN ON SCREEN]**

### **Thanks to ...**

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Susan Brown (Dornoch Cathedral)

James Cathcart (Sanctuary First)

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Church of Scotland National Worship Team

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