**5 Lent, April 6, 2014; Ezekiel 37:1-14;Ps 130; Rom 8:6-11;John 11:1-5; Rev Mary Trainor**

Just a few years ago when I taught Biology at UWSP, I had a life size plastic skeleton for the human anatomy lab. The skeleton hangs from a metal pole, and is articulated to show bone positions. Some students were fascinated to look at the bones, thinking about how their bodies work. But because the skeleton is really quite lifelike, some other students avoided it, even feared it. The bones would move (rattle, in an eerie way) when someone bumped it: dry bones. Pondering bones reminds us of our frailty, our mortality - and, in contrast, makes us grateful for the gift and joy of life. Interest in bones is not a new thing: Bones are popular in natural history museums, and the show "Body Worlds" is back in Milwaukee by popular demand for a second time. A very popular TV show is called "Bones" and the Discovery channel has a show called "Skeleton Stories" --both of these shows use forensics to study skeletal remains. So, we seem to be both fascinated and frightened by bones. Did you know that 15 % of our bodies are bone, and we have a total of 206 bones!

Bones grab our attention in today's famous OT lesson in Ezekiel. Would you believe there are over 80,000 entries in Google about this valley of the dry bones lesson. The people the Prophet Ezekiel is talking about the people of Israel who were barely alive; all the life had been sucked out of them in war. They only saw despair and darkness, and nothing to look forward to. They were had been soundly defeated in battle, and were now exiled in the foreign land called Babylon [about 50 miles south of Bagdad, Iraq]. Their sacred temple had been destroyed, many were imprisoned, and the rest were overtaken by utter poverty: they were starving. They stated, "***Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely"*** (37:11).

Many of us, who have experienced extremely dark times in our lives, can relate to this image of "***dry bones***." We have felt lifeless, desiccated, not knowing where to turn for help, convinced there was no source of hope. [And, if we personally have not experienced this, we sure know of people who have.] Jesus understood deep sadness too; in today's Gospel we read: "***Jesus began to weep."*** He was overcome and cried over the death of his dear friend Lazarus. This "dry bones" way of barely living is evident in our culture today in people imprisoned by apathy or abuse, addiction, extreme poverty, suffering from pain or illness. What is the way out? Where is the hope? Our culture tells us that the hope can be found in more material things or more money or more power or more popularity or more talent or more of what other people have that we don't have. But, we know that these things can't really give us hope. Our only real source of hope is God: more of God in our lives.

God used the Prophet Ezekiel to illustrate His kind of lasting, real hope. God said, "***Oh dry bones,*** ***I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and...put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord."*** And then, Ezekiel did as God commanded and right before him this transformation happened - the people changed from being hopeless dry bones into people full of life. They were raised up from their despair into newness. What an amazing scene this was!! And, this was no sci fi or horror movie--this was real; real people coming back. God is all about renewal, resuscitation, restoration, rejuvenation, and resurrection -- for them, and for us too; back then, and today!! Our Psalm captured this hope-filled message with these words, "***Out of the depths have I called to you, O Lord***.(yes, the depths of despair-and then...)***with Him there is plenteous redemption***." Please open your BCP to page 861 and read with me the definition of Christian Hope: "The Christian hope is to live with confidence in newness and fullness of life, and to await the coming of Christ in glory, and the completion of God's purpose for the world." This pertains to us!

Doug Lee is in his 30s, but he looks like dry bones. He is severely disabled by M.S. and lives in a wheelchair down the hall from my mother in the Episcopal Home in Milwaukee. One would think that Doug would be down, but he is not, because of God's presence brought to him through the people who help him throughout the day and night. The same is true about others who live on the floor. One of those wonderful people who cares for him, named Pam, came from a family environment of addiction and abuse. For a while, Pam was sucked down by her background - but she responded to God's love, took Jesus' hand, and received God's breath, she allowed God to raise up her dry bones and give her a new life, a new beginning. She is now an instrument for breathing that God breath into others--and I see this when I am in Milwaukee! Jesus said, "***I am he resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die***."

So, watching, listening and responding to Jesus are vital elements of having our dry bones be raised up, having our dry spirits have life breathed into them. The Gospel ends with "***Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him***." People saw Jesus' raise Lazarus from the dead, and they responded; they believed in Jesus as Savior. Will you allow God to breathe life into the dryness of your life? Oh yes, the cure for our lifeless, troubled lives is more of Jesus.

I'd like to end today's sermon time with a song called **"Give Me Jesus" (by Jeremy Camp): In the morning, when I rise; In the morning, when I rise; In the morning, when I rise; Give me Jesus.; Give me Jesus, ; Give me Jesus.; You can have all this world,; Just give me Jesus. When I am alone,; When I am alone, When I am alone, Give me Jesus. Give me Jesus. Give me Jesus,  Give me Jesus. You can have all this world, Just give me Jesus. When I come to die, When I come to die, When I come to die, Give me Jesus. Give me Jesus. Give me Jesus,  Give me Jesus. You can have all this world, Just give me Jesus. Give me Jesus. Give me Jesus,  Give me Jesus. You can have all this world, You can have all this world,  You can have all this world,  Just give me Jesus.**