

**22**

Mar

## Redemption Road

Renewed in Mercy

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT, YEAR A

However you approach this constellation of passages, pay attention to how they point your congregation toward the redemption road, the road that leads us toward the cross, resurrection, and into the whole world.

### REFERENCES

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 130

Romans 8:6-11

John 11:1-45

### COLORS

Purple

This is a transition Sunday. While not technically the end of the season of Lent, it has that feel. Next Sunday is Palm/Passion Sunday, which is followed by Holy Week and then Easter. All of that has its own momentum. So, we are concluding this worship series this week with a conversation about life out of death. A conversation? No, an experience or a faith claim. An exhortation or invitation, perhaps. We invite you to examine all four texts this week. Maybe preaching all four is a bit much for any of us. But at least look and see the resonances in each. There are familiar ones: Ezekiel's vision in the valley of dry bones or John's recounting of the raising of Lazarus. Then we have a part of Paul's theological treatise, which we call the Letter to the Romans, about death and life and flesh and spirit. All of them are rich in meaning, experience, hope, and promise.

Let's start, though, with the psalm. Psalm 130 is a part of the Psalms of Ascent tucked away toward the end of the collection. They were thought to be pilgrim songs, sung by those traveling to

Jerusalem for worship and sacrifice. Since Jerusalem sat on a hill, approaching from any direction meant going up. So, there is a geographical reference in the Psalms of Ascent, but there is also a theological reference. That is abundantly clear in Psalm 130. It begins in the lowest place. “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.” The Latin version is “De profundis,” which has become the name of this psalm. The psalm climbs from these depths to the heights of faith and hope. What begins as a personal cry for help becomes a corporate call to hope in the Lord. The psalmist addresses the God of forgiveness and promises to wait for that redemption. Then he turns to the nation and invites the whole body to wait as well—to wait with hope, to wait for a transforming love, a redeeming love that can heal all brokenness, all sinfulness – individual and corporate.

This waiting, however, is not a passive, helpless, anxiety-riddled quiescence. Instead, there is an active anticipation, a leaning into the possibilities, a search for the signs of change and hope.

“More than watchmen for the morning” (Psalm 130:6, ESV[1]) implies that lives are at stake, the psalmist’s life certainly, but the lives of the nation as well. This seeking, active looking, is the call to the church of today to identify that which brings life and redemption, that which makes new and lifts up in a world that tears down. This seeking is that which brings hope, rather than what stokes fear.

Out of the depths, whatever particular or corporate depths we find ourselves in, there is the possibility of life. That’s the redemption road we travel as followers of Jesus the Christ. That is what the chosen people of God were chosen to do and be—to be the ones who sought this road, this redemption, not as an exclusive possession, but as a way of inviting and including the whole world, no matter how dim the possibilities seem to be. Just ask Ezekiel. Standing in the valley of dry bones, he didn’t dare claim hope for himself. “Can these bones live?” was the question he heard from the Spirit who brought him there. And his answer? “You know, Lord.” He hands it back to the questioner. He didn’t dare, on his own, wouldn’t dare bring himself to the place where he could say with any confidence that there was still possibility here. It was beyond him.

Yet that was why he was brought to that place of death and dryness: to be the one who could hold out hope; to be the one who would declare resurrection. It is a burden to carry hope in hopeless times. Everyone else was sure it was over. Everyone else was sure that this was the end of everything. Ezekiel was asked to stand against that certainty and declare life in the face of death and to call to that which gives life. Prophecy to the breath, to the wind, to the Spirit. Declare what is life-giving in the face of what is death-dealing. Invite that which is transforming and reconciling into the lifeless body that has forgotten how to hope in the kingdom of God. Bind the bones together into a kin-dom of caring and hospitality.

It's hard work. It's too hard for any of us to do on our own. Is this the source of Jesus' tears in John's gospel? This onerous task of carrying hope for a hopeless world that weighs so heavily upon even him that he weeps? Not simply for a friend who has died, or even for the slow to believe, but the sheer effort of prophesying to the spirit in a valley of dry bones. Carrying the weight of expectation, of disappointment, of misunderstanding, and mis-prioritizing, he weeps. We don't know, let's be honest. But it gives us pause. We hold our breath in the face of his tears, just as much as we are in awe when he gets to his feet and raises Lazarus from the dead.

Take away the stone. That's his call to all of us who would hope with him. Take away the stone. That is his word to those of us who would lean into life with him and proclaim possibility, transformation, grace, and forgiveness with him. Take away the stone. What stones? What is blocking us today? What is keeping people from hearing the invitation to life? What is in the way of building community, loving our neighbor, serving the hurting, forgotten, ignored, and scapegoated masses of children of God who are the face of Christ for us? What are the stones that must be removed so that he can call life out of death?

Paul says flesh is that stone. He doesn't mean to imply that bodies are bad, but that appetite-driven decisions are often not the best ones. Paul says Christ calls us from the tombs of our narrow vision and self-centered living to step out into the light of the Spirit that redeems, unites, and builds up. We need to be unbound from traditions that no longer serve us and lean into traditions that enliven our spirits. We are called to be the sign that God is at work in the world, the evidence that redemption is possible. We are called to be life-givers in the best sense of the word. We are called to travel the redemption road.

[1] *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.*

//

[Notice at collection](#)

[Your Privacy Choices](#)

