

**The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa**

Lent 5

March 8, 2008

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Romans 8:6-11

John 11:1-45

We believe that Jesus is God in the flesh. We believe that in Jesus, God took to Godself a body. Because of this, even our bodies are part of the holy creation through which God is revealed. So, today I am going to invite you to take part in the sermon by using your body. Pretty scary isn't it. Here is what I am going to ask you to do. Ready? Nervous? Ready?...ok here goes.....

Everybody take a breath. Everybody breathe. Just breathe.

Have you ever noticed, that those things that we take so for granted, those things, like breathing, that are essential to life are the very things that we hardly notice. Just breathe. Just breathe. Just breathe.

Years ago, probably 18, or perhaps 21, or perhaps 23 when Linda was pregnant with our sons I remember going to the pre-natal classes in preparation for their births, and the instructor teaching us fathers and coaches how to help our wives, our partners how to breathe through labor. Get in their face, the instructor told us, and tell them to breathe.

Just breathe, just breathe, just breathe.

Some years ago I recall hearing a radio broadcast of an interview with a person who had survived a life threatening event. I believe, if my memory serves me, that the person might have been in a coma for an extended period of time. I cannot recall hardly any of the details of the interview except. I remember the interviewer asking the person: "What was the most important piece of advice any one gave you while you were recovering? The person responded. I remember a nurse coming into my room one evening and softly saying to me: "breathe, just breathe, just breathe."

This really is a good piece of advice not only at times of birth, or in the midst of serious illness. It really is a good piece of advice all through our life. Just breathe, just breathe, just breathe.

In our Ezekiel reading this morning, the prophet is carried by the spirit of God, by the breath of God, and set in a valley of bones. These bones are of course without breath. "Prophecy to the bones, and tell them that the LORD GOD will cause breath to enter them." This breath will bring the bones of Israel back to life.

In the Gospel, Jesus comes to the tomb where Lazarus is buried. Roll away the stone Jesus tells the crowd. "Surely there will be a stench Martha warns. You really don't want to breathe that stench do you Jesus?" Jesus cries with a loud voice. Jesus cries out with a voice that comes from deep in his spirit... "Lazarus come out." Jesus breathes his spirit into the tomb and calls Lazarus out of the tomb. Where the Breath of God blows, there is no stench. Where the Spirit of God blows there is no death. Where the breath of God blows, there is Life.

In the Hebrew language the word for Spirit and Breath are the same. In Genesis the spirit of God, the breath of God hovers over creation and brings life to the world. In Ezekiel, this same spirit, this same breath brings life to the dead, dry bones.

In John's Gospel Jesus is the word of God. With every word Jesus speaks, he speaks the breath of God; he speaks the spirit of God. The command Jesus shouts into the tomb, like the word the prophet speaks in the valley of dry bones is a word that is filled with God's Spirit, God's breath. In Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul speaks of the Spirit of God. Wouldn't it be interesting to substitute Breath of Christ for Spirit of Christ? The breath of God dwells in you; the breath of Christ dwells in you. The breath of God who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you.

Two weeks ago, we heard the story of how Jesus gave himself as life giving water to the woman at the well. Last week we heard how Jesus gave himself as light to the blind man. Now today he gives himself as breath of life to Lazarus as he raises him from the dead.

The Gospel wants to present this Jesus not only to the woman at the well, not only to the man born blind, not only to Lazarus but to us. He is the life giving water that quenches our thirst. He is the light that enables us to see. He is the breath that gives us life.

Jesus is the breath of God that breathes life into our tombs. Jesus is the Spirit of God who transforms the stench of death into the fresh air of new life.

Dear friends, are there places in your life that have had all life's air sucked out of them? Places of illness or brokenness? Do you have tombs that hold the stench of death? Do you have tombs filled with resentment, jealousy, anger and hatred? Do you have tombs filled fear? Tombs filled with guilt? Tombs filled with sadness, with disappointment, mistrust? Are there parts of your life that you cover with a stone because you fear the stench?

Jesus stands at the tomb crying for Lazarus to come out. Jesus stands outside the places of death in your life, calling you to come out.

Take a few moments if you will my friends, close your eyes. Picture Jesus standing along side you. Tell him where it is you are hurting. Tell him where it is that you feel most lifeless. Tell him where it is that the life has been sucked out of you. Where it is you that you stink? Where it is that you are dying? See him standing there and inviting you to breathe in his spirit, breathe in his breath.

Just breathe. Breathe in God's mercy. Just breathe. Breathe in God's hope. Just breathe. Breathe in God's light. Just breathe. Breathe in God's love. Just breathe. Just breathe. Just breathe.

Listen to God say to you: I will put my breath within you and you shall live.