

**Sunday, March 26, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church**

**Bible Study**

**Ezekiel 37:1-14, John 11:1-45 and Psalm 130**

**Fifth Sunday in Lent: “Who Could Stand?”**

Open with a word of prayer

**Gathering Time** (5-10 minutes). In groups of two or three, have participants respond to the following question. “What have you learned during this Lenten season?”

**Ezekiel 37:1-14. Context.** Ezekiel, the son of one of the Temple priests, was among the first of the Israelites (along with the young king, queen mother, and other nobles) to be taken essentially as hostages to Babylon in 597 BCE in an attempt by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, to ensure the submission of his new vassal state of Judah. Ezekiel began his prophetic ministry a few years later in 593 BCE when those still in charge in Jerusalem mounted a feeble and failed rebellion. He excoriated the leaders who presumed upon God’s protection of the house of David and the Temple, even when they had failed in their covenant obligations to worship God alone and to protect God’s people with justice and fairness and not to ravage them. Their misdeeds finally resulted in the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586. At that point Ezekiel’s thunderous judgment turned to promises of restoration: for the sake of God’s own name, the people would eventually be restored and God would make a new covenant with them – one that would never be broken. This week’s reading is among the first of those promising new life to a broken nation.

**John 11:1-45. Context.** This week’s reading recounts the last, and most dramatic, of Jesus’ “signs” that he performs in John’s gospel before his own passion: the raising of Lazarus. John the Evangelist always calls these mighty deeds of Jesus “signs” because they point to God and something about the meaning of God for our lives. In this story, much is made that Lazarus had been dead 3 days already when Jesus finally arrived. In ancient Jewish culture, it was thought that it took three days for one’s spirit to travel to the afterlife, after which time there was no hope of resuscitation. It’s a way of saying that Lazarus was really dead. As in earlier stories, one of the characters, here Martha, misunderstands Jesus regarding what will happen to her brother. Ironically, it is this event that will cause the religious leaders to seek Jesus’ life – a point not lost on Thomas.

**Psalm 130. Context.** One of the “penitential” psalms, this psalm expresses the despair of our sinfulness, but proclaims that not even the depths of despair and sinfulness are beyond God’s love and redemption. These words also reflect the experience of God’s people in exile.

**Read Ezekiel 37:1-14, John 11:1-45 and Psalm 130**

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn't make sense to you in the text?

**Read Ezekiel 37:1-14, John 11:1-45 and Psalm 130 again -**

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

**Some reflection questions –**

- Where do you find conviction and hope in Psalm 130?
- What might have been your response to the question God asked Ezekiel in 37:3?
- What might it look like for God to breathe new life into your church today? What would that look like for the church? What would it mean for the larger community?
- What are some of the emotions Jesus might have felt when he was weeping in John 11:35? How might verse 38 give us a clue?
- Imagine you were a witness to Lazarus's resuscitation (Technically, Lazarus was resuscitated, not resurrected. Lazarus would physically die again.) What do you feel? What does it smell like? What new questions does this experience spark?
- How do these passages help us stand or find a grounding for who we are and what we (as the church) are about?

**Closing Reflection Question**

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

**Prayer** (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

**Sending Forth** (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

God of New Life, breathe anew in us today. Breathe a fresh wind of hope, life, and joy in each of us and in the life of our congregation. Through your mercy and grace, give us assurance of whose we are and empower us to live according to your holy character.

**Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven  
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in Heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power  
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.