

COLLECT

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son
Jesus Christ
delivered and saved the world:
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross
we may triumph in the power of his victory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

FIRST READING Ezekiel 37:1-14

A reading from the book of the prophet Ezekiel.

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 around 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."

PSALM Psalm 130

R *My soul waits for the Lord.*

Out of the depths have I cried to you, O Lord;
Lord, hear my voice;
let your ears consider well the voice of my
supplication.
If you, Lord, were to mark what is done amiss,
O Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you shall be feared. **R**

I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him;
in his word is my hope.
My soul waits for the Lord,
more than the night watch for the morning,
more than the night watch for the morning. **R**

O Israel, wait for the Lord,
for with the Lord there is mercy;
With him is plenteous redemption
and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins. **R**

SECOND READING Romans 8:6-11

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Romans.

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law – indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

GOSPEL John 11:1-45

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

A certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had

come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the 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. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

POST COMMUNION

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us
that what we do for the least of our brothers and
sisters
we do also for you:
give us the will to be the servant of others
as you were the servant of all,
and gave up your life and died for us,
but are alive and reign, now and for ever.



Breathe easy

Heather Smith *reflects on* Ezekiel 37:1-14

Today's bones in the reading from Ezekiel are dry and scattered. They are long dead and long past any hope of new life. Their flesh is gone and they have no lungs with which to breathe. This was the state in which Israel found itself. There was no hope. The people felt themselves to be completely cut off from God. It's so easy to slip into that state without realising that it's happening. Before we know it, God can seem a distant memory and we feel alienated, lacking energy and motivation, wondering how we will ever get it back.

But God specialises in lost causes. No matter how hopeless a situation seems, it will move forward. God breathes life into

seemingly dead situations and people breathe again. Life that seemed to have become stale and hopeless is renewed.

They say that where there's life there's hope, and breath is essential for life. The Hebrew word *ruach* means both "breath" and "spirit". God promises to breathe life into the dry bones, but in doing so God also breathes the Holy Spirit into those who are renewed, giving the energy and spirit to live again, to re-cultivate our relationship with God and with each other. Perhaps a new saying is in order: "Where there's breath there's Spirit", God's Spirit, which brings new possibilities where once there seemed none. It is the daily miracle of life. 🌸

Breathe on us the breath that brings your Spirit, Lord. Renew and reinvigorate us to move forward into new and exciting possibilities. Amen.



Leap into Lent

Ricarda Witcombe continues her Lenten series.

Today we enter the last two weeks of Lent, and the atmosphere of the season is changing. This is Passiontide. We begin to walk with Christ through the depths of human existence, facing the things we fear and struggle with most: our weaknesses, betrayals, failures, injuries, doubts, and ultimately death itself.

The word "passion" comes from the Latin word meaning "to suffer". The same root gives us the word "patient" and takes our minds to hospital waiting rooms and beds – places of deep fear as well as hope and healing. Passiontide tells us and shows us that Christ truly is Emmanuel – God with us.

We walk through the darkest valleys, and find that God is there too. Can we dare, in these two weeks, to face those valleys in our own lives? Perhaps we might begin simply by naming our fears as we spend time in prayer this week. 🌸

“ **Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.**

Isaiah 40:28

Walking with Poppy

The trouble with bones

by Gillian Cooper

Poppy is now ten, and she has arthritis. Mostly she is fine, but every six months or so we need a visit to the vet for some injections or pills. Apparently her bones have never quite fitted together properly, and it is too late to fix them now.

The prophet Ezekiel sees bones, a huge pile of them,

and not connected at all, even badly. They look like a vast army of soldiers, their flesh long decayed. Ezekiel realises to his shock that they represent the dead nation of Israel, defeated and scattered. But as he watches, the breath of God blows and a nation is reborn.

In Lent we face our mortality. We are all destined to become a heap of bones. But the breath of God still blows through the universe. One day we will run freely in God's kingdom. One day, I dare to hope, Poppy will run freely there too. 🌸