

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
March 29, 2020
by Rev. Dave Le Grand and Rev. Catherine Somerville

Dave:

Dry bones – a vision given Ezekiel by God of a withered, dead looking Israel's people exiled to Babylon – but a glimpse of resurrection to come. When will it come? It cannot come fast enough. In our lives we need a glimmer of new life in the shadowy, wilderness times of our lives. That glimpse sometimes teases us. The Lent season encourages us to name this long, journey through dry bones, through waiting, even agonizing before the New Life comes.

In this surreal time for many of us, Catherine, and friends at home, as we watch minute to minute updates on COVID-19, statistics and stories, all virus-related, I think that we can all relate in some way to the Psalm writer of Psalm 130. "Out of the depths, I cry!" He or she, the Psalmist cries out. This is a desperate cry. There is a quality of waiting for God, waiting for reason to hope. This is a person who is in shadowy times, like the 23rd Psalm last week talked about – the valley of shadow. Theologian Martin Marty points out something that is so true - that in worship we don't like lament and agonized speeches. We don't like negative emotions, but instead love mountain top experiences with Moses & Jesus, and joy. We don't want to waste time muddling in the wilderness with people who complain.

But, sometimes, there we are. We still want to escape the tough emotions. In this particular time, though, maybe more than a few of us now relate well to today's Psalm reading. Waiting – patient waiting? I don't know many people who wait well. I don't. I don't think we like waiting. Now, there is the waiting in our culture that is an annoyance, that is different from the agonizing waiting. Waiting while listening to that terrible music hold needing help with your internet – that is annoying waiting. Agonized waiting is when you are asked to sit in the waiting room while your mother or husband undergoes heart surgery. Right now, many people have loved ones in long term care homes, and they cannot go in to see them because of a quarantine.

But waiting is not just passive, empty time waiting for today's Psalm. Catherine, this is active, engaged waiting, and I think that there is a window into a faithful waiting that might help us in our very challenging times today – whether we are isolated in our homes or apartments because of the outbreak, or maybe we in profound conflict with our partner in life, or laid off and wondering where the next paycheck will come from.

Catherine:

Thanks Dave.

One commentator linked the idea of waiting to watching. But not just "looking out the window and seeing what our neighbours are up to now"—not that sort of watching. He invites us to hold these two ideas together, waiting and watching, and to link them with the cords of hope and promise. He writes: Perched in hope's highest rampart, peering into the darkness, measuring the horizon lumen by lumen, watching for dawn to appear. Those words remind us that we have work to do now: God's people wait, but we watch hopefully. That stance, of watching with hope, is the difference between resignation and

resurrection. And it is the gift that you and I can give to our community this week, especially now.

Rather than focusing on the scary news, push back from all that information, and consider the signs you have seen this week that have made your spirit soar. Think of the things that have made your heart rejoice. Despite what the media wants to tell us – over and over and over again – there are a million reminders that real life continues and it matters. Goodness, laughter, compassion, generosity, those are the things that ultimately matter.

From my own rampart, out in Val Caron, and as I have been making my way around this week, I have watched hope flourish in the calls and expressions of care neighbours are making, the check ins: “How are you doing? Really?”

I see hope in people having the time to cook good food rather than grabbing easy take out, tending to their bodies in good ways, sleeping more, resting, going for walks.

I am watching all the people sitting in their driveways, in their cars, basking in the warmth of the sunshine, and “in spite of” choosing to enjoy and celebrate a moment.

I had an email from a friend the other day, telling me that she had been watching the birds feast on the berries of her mountain ash tree, and that they actually became a bit tipsy, with all the sweet juice they were eating. They fall off the branches and are enjoying a lovely, inebriated sleep under the tree.

Watching videos that you are sending of your grandchildren at play.

Watching the expressions of service all around us.

Watching Deb help the food bank.

Watching people bring extra supplies to the police station and the fire halls.

Watching the scientists make progress.

A challenge for the people of God this week is to remind ourselves that we have a calling, to look with the eyes of hope, and point out, draw attention, and be on the lookout for all the signs of resurrection that we are seeing.

So, we wait – all of us are waiting now, but we can also see with new eyes, with God’s eye, and with the guidance of a generous heart. Resurrection is on its way.

Dave:

Holy One, in these tumultuous times, the din of experts and amateurs alike speak too loudly in our ears. Clear the chaos, God, with the sound of your still small voice reminding us that this too will pass. What will remain will be your love and peace that has always been there, if only we allow ourselves the space and silence to experience you. Amen.