

ORDER OF SERVICE

Service of the Word ELW (red), p. 211-222

Fifth Sunday in Lent

[* Indicates when the congregation is standing as able]

[**Bolded** section of text is for congregation to recite]

Music Director: Lois Horst

Gathering

Prelude 'Prelude in A minor' (Bach)

Welcome & Announcements

* **Confession and Forgiveness**

Blessed be the holy Trinity, one God, who forgives, whose mercy endures forever. **Amen.**

Let us confess our wrongdoings before God, who removes our guilt and blots out all offenses.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Gracious God,

have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

For seeking worldly delights that deceive us and dishonour you:

Gracious God,

have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

For desiring self-reliance instead of hungering for your word:

Gracious God,

have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

For failing to recognize your coming reign,

and for hindering the work of the Spirit: Gracious God,

have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

For drawing from the well of self-serving ambition,

and for disdainning the living water Christ offers: Gracious God,

have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

For disregarding voices from the margin,

and for distrusting signs of your healing and hope in the world:

Gracious God,

have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

For dwelling in tombs of self-pity and discontent,

and for disregarding Christ's call to come forth to life:

Gracious God,

have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

God's steadfast love, grace, and forgiveness abound. Through faith, the free gift of God, you have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ, your wrongdoings are forgiven. The Spirit of the One who raised Christ from the dead dwells in you, pours God's love into your hearts, and gives you life and peace. **Amen.**

Extinguishing of the fifth Lenten Candle

When we arrived this morning, we entered into the normal bustle of a church on a Sunday morning: friends greeting each other, volunteers, pastor, choir, choir director getting ready for the service. Now that we are sitting in the pews, I invite you to consider the word, 'sanctuary'. A sanctuary is a place set aside for sacred things. It is a place of refuge and protection. This room is a sanctuary. The season of Lent is a kind of sanctuary, extended in time. And one of the things Lent teaches is that you, too, are a sanctuary. There is a place inside you for sacred things, a place where God abides.

Silent time

As we extinguish this light, we acknowledge the darkness and pain of war and oppression in the world.

The fifth candle is extinguished, then:

Loving God,

we open our hearts to you. We invite you into our inmost being, only to find you already there. Strengthen us in our quiet places and then lead us into the work of justice and peace. Amen.

*** Hymn (red) 334 Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery (v. 1+Lent 5)**

1 Tree of Life and awesome myst'ry,
in your death we are reborn;
though you die in all of hist'ry,
still you rise with ev'ry morn,
still you rise with ev'ry morn.

Lent 5

God of all our fear and sorrow,
God who lives beyond our death,
hold us close through each tomorrow,
love as near as ev'ry breath.

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*** Apostolic Greeting (p. 213)**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Response: **And also with you.**

*** Kyrie (p. 213)**

Kyrie eleison: **Lord, have mercy.**

Christe eleison: **Christ, have mercy.**

Kyrie eleison: **Lord, have mercy.**

*** Prayer of the Day**

God of life, present and promised, you are the One to whom we call: for you are the One who hears, and you are the One who acts, bringing us new life with your grace and love and power. Lead us in our time of worship, that we may be prepared to follow your lead in places where life is at risk—places where hope seems far away, places where dreams die during sleep. When we leave these walls, help us live the teachings we proclaim within this place of worship, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Choir 'You Raise Me Up' (Lovland/Graham)

Word

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

The First Reading is from the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 37:

¹ 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. ² He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³ He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ 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." ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, 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." ¹⁰ I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. ¹¹ 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.' ¹² Therefore prophecy 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. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD when I open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ 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."

Response: Word of God. Word of Life. **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 130 (sung responsively)

Psalm 130 is sung responsively:

¹ Out | of the depths

I cry to | you, O LORD;

² **O LORD, | hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my | supplication.**

³ If you were to keep watch | over sins,
O LORD, | who could stand?

⁴ **Yet with you | is forgiveness,
in order that you | may be feared.**

⁵ I wait for you, O LORD; | my soul waits;
in your word | is my hope.

⁶ **My soul waits for the Lord more than those who keep watch | for the morning,
more than those who keep watch | for the morning.**

⁷ O Israel, wait for the LORD, for with the LORD there is | steadfast love;
with the LORD there is plen- | teous redemption.

⁸ **For the LORD shall | redeem Israel
from | all their sins.**

*** Gospel Acclamation 'Return to the Lord' (p. 216)**

Return to the Lord, your God,
return to the Lord, your God,
who is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

*** Gospel: John 11:1-45 (Dramaturgical Reading)**

Sharon (Narrator)

Jesus had been informed that one of his most beloved friends, Lazarus, was gravely ill. But he insisted that this illness would not lead to death but would be used by God as a witness to the Son of God. But word came to Jesus that Lazarus had died and all were saddened by the news. Jesus insisted that this was the time to go to the home of Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus. Before Jesus arrived, Martha got word that he was on his way, and she hurried out to meet him.

Cathy (Martha)

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.

Ken (Jesus)

Your brother will rise again.

Cathy (Martha)

I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.

Ken (Jesus)

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?

Cathy (Martha)

Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.

Sharon (Narrator)

And having said this, Martha returned home to tell Mary that she had spoken with Jesus, who was on his way to see them. Mary got up quickly and ran out of the house to see Jesus.

Heike (Mary)

Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

Ken (Jesus)

Where have you laid him?

Heike (Mary)

Lord, come and see.

Sharon (Narrator)

They led Jesus to the tomb in which Lazarus had been laid. All those who followed Mary and Jesus were amazed and moved by his love for his friend Lazarus. When they arrived at the cave, Jesus gave them instruction.

Ken (Jesus)

Take away the stone.

Cathy (Martha)

Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.

Ken (Jesus)

Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?

Sharon (Narrator)

And so they rolled the stone away.

Ken (Jesus)

Father, I thank you for having heard me. I know 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. Lazarus, come out!

Sharon (Narrator)

And Lazarus came out, his hands and feet bound with the strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth.

Ken (Jesus)

Unbind him, and let him go.

Sharon (Narrator)

Many of the people who had come with Mary and Martha to the tomb had seen what had happened and they believed in Jesus.

*** Hymn (red) ELW 712 Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service**

- 1 Lord, whose love in humble service
bore the weight of human need,
who upon the cross, forsaken,
worked your mercy's perfect deed:
we, your servants, bring the worship
not of voice alone, but heart;
consecrating to your purpose
ev'ry gift which you impart.
- 2 Still your children wander homeless;
still the hungry cry for bread;
still the captives long for freedom;
still in grief we mourn our dead.
As you, Lord, in deep compassion
healed the sick and freed the soul,
by your Spirit send your power
to our world to make it whole.
- 3 As we worship, grant us vision,
till your love's revealing light
in its height and depth and greatness
dawns upon our quickened sight,
making known the needs and burdens
your compassion bids us bear,
stirring us to ardent service,
your abundant life to share.
- 4 Called by worship to your service,
forth in your dear name we go,
to the child, the youth, the aged,
love in living deeds to show;
hope and health, good will and comfort,
counsel, aid and peace we give,
that your servants, Lord, in freedom
may your mercy know and live.

Text: Albert F. Bayly, 1901-1984. Text © 1961 Oxford University Press

Message

Grace and peace from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Amen!

You may think it's creepy, but the lesson from the Book of Ezekiel which we heard as part of our lessons for today is one of my favorite passages of the Bible. What a visual! A whole valley filled with dry bones that rattle as they are restored to life! God has the power to bring back to life what is dead.

For some reason, the passage from Ezekiel made me think of a certain kind of fresco or painting that started to pop up in many churches in Europe in the late Medieval Ages; The 'Danse Macabre', the 'Dance of Death'. Maybe you've seen this motif before a long line of people being led in a dance by skeletons – dry bones, walking around. In this line, we usually find kings and popes, noble ladies and peasants, children, people in their prime, old people. It's maybe a little bit like we find on Dia De Los Muertos – the day of the dead. Which is a celebration in Mexico where life and death meet in colour, fragrance and memories.

What these depictions of the Dance of the Dead express is obvious: death is the great equalizer; death doesn't distinguish between rich and poor, young or old. Death is universal, and we all must face it at some point. And if you think of the late medieval ages, yes, death was all around; one theory is that the depictions of the Danse Macabre starting to popping up everywhere, from Paris to Tallinn, as the plague was ravaging Europe in the 14th century.

Now what struck me when I see images of the Dance of the Dead is the contrast between the living people and the skeletons. Ironically, the dead look more alive than the living. The skeletons seem to dance with abandon, whereas the still living look reluctant and stiff. And I guess that's understandable: who wants to take death's cold and bony hand and go to the grave? But why the exuberance of the skeletons, the dead? Is it just a cruel joke? Or do they maybe know something the living don't?

Usually, we don't have to deal with death that much. Humanity has come a long way in treating illnesses and diseases and prolonging life (thanks be to God). Not that long ago I had an interesting conversation with a funeral director, and we agreed that the way how we deal with death and its aftermath has changed a lot in our society. Obviously, the old funeral rituals in our churches are not seen as life giving anymore. Public mourning as we do in funeral service seems difficult. We don't want to show our pain and feelings in front of others. As someone who feels carried by our community of faith it is not easy to adapt to the different ways how some of the younger generations deal with death.

I grew up in a smaller town in Germany, where still thirty years ago the village community got together when someone passed away. Grief was carried together. As a young pastor I served in a community with many late repatriates from the former German enclaves mostly from Kazakhstan and Russia. Some of them had been members in my congregation. More on paper than as active members – as their way of worshipping was so different from what we used to do. But I grew close especially with one elderly couple and their life stories about the Gulag and forced labour were horrendous. When the patriarch died, I was asked to officiate the funeral and it was the first time that I ever experienced wailing women in action. At first it felt disconcerting to observe those three elderly women screaming, crying, throwing their arms up in the air and hanging on to the casket. But I could see how it helped the family through their pain. They served as canvas for the family's grief. So, I have seen it all the public and the private mourning. And there is no right or wrong in ways how people grief – most important is that those who mourn receive healing. But death can't be pushed away. It is a reality. And we all have to face this reality.

Jesus came into the world as a human being, destined to die from the moment he was born. Death didn't magically disappear the moment he entered the world – no, as we can see when we read through the gospels, there is a great need for healing. And there is death.

Today's gospel story tells of the raising of Lazarus, Jesus' dear friend. We don't know how old Lazarus is when he dies – but as we can gather from the story, his death happens after a brief illness and is quite unexpected. His loss hits his sisters, Mary and Martha, hard. They grieve, they wrestle with the death of their brother, and are looking for answers when Jesus finally, finally, arrives – and he's seemingly too late. But even Jesus is touched in the deepest way by his friend's death. 'Jesus wept,' we hear. It is hard for Jesus, the human being, it is hard for Jesus, the eternal God, to grapple with the reality of death.

Jesus wept back then, and I believe that God has wept over every death of one of his beloved children – and that God is weeping now, as we are made aware of so many untimely deaths in this world, be it through war, violence, disaster, accidents, or other illnesses that kill people prematurely. God shares in our humanity. And this God made flesh shares in our death. We hear in today's gospel about the trepidation of the disciples to head toward Bethany, where Lazarus and his sisters live, dangerously close to Jerusalem. How can you Jesus? It's too dangerous! Remember how they just tried to kill you? And Thomas sure knows what's coming: Let us go also, that we might die with him. There's the cross; there's no way around it.

But that's not all. There is hope, there is reason for confidence. Even before Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, Martha has confidence that Jesus has the ultimate power over death: 'I know that Lazarus will rise again in the resurrection on the last day,' she says.

And that's the ultimate hope. But Jesus wants to show those who are gathered to grieve Lazarus' death what lies ahead: we read that Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead as a sign, so that everyone who witnesses it understands the power of Christ – so that everyone understands that death doesn't have the last word, that God is a God of life, that God is a God of love, and that love is stronger than anything, even death. The empty tomb on Easter morn is the ultimate sign of *this* reality.

And that's not just a comfort for some distant or maybe not so distant future: it also influences how we live in the here and now. 'Teach us to count our days so that we may gain a wise heart,' Psalm 90 says. Yes, we are terminal, but while we are alive and kicking on this planet, we are agents of life, we are agents of God's love. God created us so that we live life to the fullest, a truly fulfilled life, a meaningful life, a life that is lived in community and shared with others. God created us to dance with abandon, celebrating life here and now, celebrating life eternal.

I already raised the question about those skeletons that are depicted in all those frescoes and paintings in churches all over Europe in the 'Dance of the Dead': why do they seem to be more alive than the living? As we all know, art is in the eye of the beholder, and as I am beholding these images, I tend to think: the dead know something we maybe don't know. They have experienced that there is more to come, that God indeed has the power to put those dead and dry bones back together and breathe life into them, that's why they celebrate.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

*** Hymn (red) ELW 485 I Am the Bread of Life**

1 "I am the Bread of life.
You who come to me shall not hunger,
and who believe in me shall not thirst.
No one can come to me unless the Father beckons."

Refrain

"And I will raise you up,
and I will raise you up,
and I will raise you up on the last day."

2 "The bread that I will give
is my flesh for the life of the world,
and if you eat of this bread,
you shall live forever, you shall live forever." *Refrain*

3 "Unless you eat

of the flesh of the Son of Man
and drink of his blood,
and drink of his blood,
you shall not have life within you." *Refrain*

4 "I am the resurrection,
I am the life.
If you believe in me,
even though you die, you shall live forever." *Refrain*

5 Yes, Lord, I believe
that you are the Christ,
the Son of God,
who have come into the world. *Refrain*

Text: Suzanne Toolan, RSM, b. 1927, based on John 6. Text © 1966, 1970, 1986, 1993 GIA Publications, Inc., 7404 S. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638. www.giamusic.com. 800.442.3358. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

*** Apostles' Creed (p. 217)**

With the whole church we confess our Christian faith.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

*** Prayers of Intercession**

Response: Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Reconciled by God's mercy and sustained by God's presence, let us pray for the world and its needs. Each prayer petition concludes with the response: 'Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great'.

A brief silence.

We pray for the church. Grant life and peace to all who gather in your name. Breathe into us so that we may share your message of forgiveness, hope, and love. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for creation. Renew landscapes that have dried up, prosper the work of those who restore homes and habitats after natural disasters, and sustain places where biodiversity thrives. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for the nations. Unbind leaders trapped by fear to act boldly for justice, free all who live in places of war and violence, especially those in Ukraine, the Near East and Sudan. Guide refugees and asylum seekers to safety. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for all people in need. Take away the stone of poverty that weighs down so many. Console any who weep and heal all who are sick, especially those on our prayer list and those we name in our hearts Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for this assembly. Ready the hearts and spirits of all of us as we are preparing for Holy Week and Easter. Deepen our wonder at the mystery of your resurrection and life. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We offer our thanksgiving for all people who have died in faith. Give us faith to trust in your power to redeem and save, and bring us up from our graves to life in you. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Receive our prayers, O God, through Jesus Christ, our strength and salvation. **Amen.**

*** Peace (p. 218)**

The peace of Christ will be with you always.

Response: **And also with you.**

Thanksgiving

Offering

*** Hymn of the Month (blue) ACS 924 As the Winter Days Grow Longer**

1 As the winter days grow longer,
drawing short the hours of night;
as our eager expectation
waits for Easter's dawning light—
yearning people, here we gather,
turning watchful eyes to you:
God who blesses earth with springtime,
shine within our world anew!

2 As the vines burst into blossom,
fragrant in the morning air,
lifting spirits with their sweetness,
luring hearts to thankful prayer—
Lenten people, here we gather,
seeking lives refreshed from sin.
God who blesses earth with springtime,
bloom within our hearts again!

3 As we journey through this season,
pilgrims through a thirsty land,
quench us with your living presence;
guide us with your loving hand.
Wand'ring people, here we gather,
called to rest along our way.
God who blesses earth with springtime,
grant us sabbath joy this day!

Text: Mary Louise Bringle, b. 1953. Text © 2006 GIA Publications, Inc., giamusic.com. All rights reserved.

*** Thanksgiving for the Word (p. 220)**

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us to the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast; through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit be honour and glory forever. **Amen.**

*** Lord's Prayer (p. 221)**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Sending

* **Blessing**

Receive the blessing of the holy Trinity: God, who calls all things into existence, Jesus Christ, who redeems us, and the Holy Spirit, whose breath sustains creation, bless you now and always. **Amen.**

* **Hymn (red) ELW 758 You Are the Way**

- 1 You are the way; to you alone
from sin and death we flee;
all those who search for God, you find
and by your grace set free.
- 2 You are the truth; your word alone
true wisdom can impart;
you only can inform the mind
and purify the heart.
- 3 You are the life; the rending tomb
proclaims your conqu'ring arm;
and those who put their trust in you
not death nor hell shall harm.
- 4 You are the way, the truth, the life;
grant us that way to know,
that truth to keep, that life to win,
whose joys eternal flow.

Text: George W. Doane, 1799-1859, alt.

* **Dismissal**

Go in peace. Do justice. Love mercy. **Thanks be to God.**

Postlude 'Fugue in A minor' (Bach)

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