



# Deering Community Church

Pastor: Barbara Lockett Currie

## NEW LIFE

SERMON FOR LENT 5 APRIL 10, 2011

SCRIPTURE: Ezekiel 37:1-14; John 11: 1-7, 17-27, 32-45

Today's scriptures plus the baptism of the Carter children, are all about new life. In the United Church of Christ there are only two sacraments: baptism and Holy Communion. In baptism, the water, words, and actions are the visible signs of our becoming united with Jesus in his death and resurrection. We believe that the Holy Spirit is in the act of baptism and facilitates God's forgiveness and our acceptance into the care of Christ's church universal. This is indeed the beginning of a lifetime of new growth and life in the Christian faith.

Both our scriptures have death and resurrection for their themes. The background of the Ezekiel dry bones passage is that the Babylonians tortured the people of Jerusalem in a siege warfare that lasted about two years and led to horrible famine, disease, despair and death (2 Kings 25:3). This is why there is a valley of dry bones; however, that is not the end of the story. The prophet Ezekiel prophesies to the bones to reanimate, with the sinews obeying, with flesh and skin covering them. Yet there was not yet life; there was no breath in the mortal, so God instructed Ezekiel to call on the four winds in order to breathe the breath of life into the mortals. This Greek word is *ruah* and can be translated both as breath and Spirit, and it is necessary for life, the same breath of God that entered the first human in Genesis.

In the Gospel of John we have the story of a family in Bethany—Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, sisters and a brother, a family that Jesus dearly loved;



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they were his good friends. Lazarus has fallen sick, and Martha sends word to Jesus in Jerusalem to come as she believes he will be able to heal him.

Jerusalem was two miles away from Bethany, and Jesus delayed his departure. It wasn't necessary for him to hurry as he knew that he had the power of life and death as part of his divine persona. He was confident that he could use this power to bring Lazarus back to life. When he arrived we are told Lazarus has been dead four days. Both sisters expressed their upset, and we know that Jesus wept over the situation. Jesus asks Martha if she believes that he is the resurrection and the life, in other words the waited-for Messiah. She says that she does believe! Yet the narrative shows she has big doubts that it's possible for her brother to be brought back to life. I don't know about you, but I'm someone that often prays, "God I believe, help my unbelief." What about you here this morning? I imagine most of you are a mixture of belief in the Spirit and also doubts and questions about such unscientific experiences. Whatever we believe about what factually happened with Jesus and Lazarus, there is no question that this event was transforming and life-altering for his followers.

Jesus goes to the tomb, a cave with a stone lying against it. Jesus instructed them to take away the stone. He then calls Lazarus to "Come Out!" Lazarus came out with his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face also wrapped in a cloth. Jesus tells the mourners "Unbind him and let him go." I wonder if Jesus is calling to us to "Come Out" and to get rid of whatever it is that's binding us, that's holding us back? Is anything holding you back from being and doing what you are meant to be or do? Are any of you bound by hopelessness like Ezekiel's people? Do the tragedies of nature and politics lead you to such discouragement that you feel immobilized? Are you bound by



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fears, addictions, anxiety, financial problems? Is there someone you need to forgive? Are there things pulling you down or pulling you apart? I'm here to tell you that new life is possible. Also know that I'm available to talk with you about these things.

The United Church of Christ has a slogan that God is still speaking. This still speaking God is calling us out of our tombs of despair, denial, and death--calling us to new life right now, right here. It is never too late to hope, it is never too late to be changed. Our dry bones can get up and dance.

Easter will be here in just two more weeks. Easter is the ultimate day of new life. Just as the Carter children and most of us began that new life in Christ with our baptism, we have a new opportunity every Easter. If we let Jesus unbind us and let us go, there's no stopping us! What we are on our own cannot compare with what we can be if we let the Spirit transform our life. We can change the world in the direction that Ann Weems wrote about in "Reaching for the Rainbows":

**I keep reaching for the rainbows.**

**Thinking one morning**

**The hungry will be fed,**

**The dying held,**

**The maimed walking,**

**The angry stoked,**

**The violence stroked,**

**The oppressed freed,**

**The oppressors changed,**

**and every tear wiped away.**



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**My sisters and brothers, we have to do more than just reach for rainbows; if we let Jesus into our hearts, and minds, and souls, we will know what we should be doing in the next chapter in our journey. Bless each of you as you listen for the Spirit calling you to Come out. Amen**