

# Restore us, O God! We breathe.

LENT 5

## Scripture

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

## Focus statement

When we come to the end of our own human strength, vitality, and purpose, we recognize the reality of death in and around us. God, who is Spirit, breathes life into us, revealing God's glory and purpose. We, and the community, are restored.

## Song suggestions

### THEME SONG:

**STJ 29** You Are All We Have (*use with ritual later in the service*)

**HWB 26** Holy Spirit, Come with Power

**HWB 336** When Peace, like a River

**HWB 349** Spirit of the Living God

**HWB 356** Breathe on Me, Breath of God

**HWB 483** O God, Who Gives Us Life

**STJ 29** You Are All We Have

**STJ 35** O Breath of Life

**STJ 46** O Breathe on Me, O Breath of God

**STS 49** I Will Come to You in the Silence

**STS 106** Comme un souffle fragile / Like a Tender Breath, Stirring

**STS 121** Nothing Is Lost on the Breath of God

“Breathe” by Michael W. Smith

“Days of Elijah” by Robin Mark

“Everlasting God” by Chris Tomlin

## Call to worship

Leader: Come. Bring your weary bones and your crushed souls.

**All:** *Now is the time to worship the life-giving Spirit.*

Leader: Come. Bring your dashed hopes and broken dreams.

**All:** *Now is the time to worship the life-giving Spirit.*

Leader: Come. Bring your heavy sorrow and lingering sadness.

**All:** *Now is the time to worship the life-giving Spirit.*

Leader: Bring all you that you have and all that you are.

The Spirit is here to breathe life into all that is lifeless.

## Offering prayer

With all that we have and all that we are, we honor you. Restore us, O God, to live in freedom and trust.

## Lenten ritual

Lead the congregation in a body/centering/breathing prayer. You may move your hands in accordance with the words of the theme song (“You Are All We Have” *STJ 29*). A small group of musicians can play or sing the song while the rest of the congregation joins in the breathing and movement.

## Confession and words of assurance

Leader: God, we confess that when we look into the valleys of our lives,  
we are tempted to fix our gaze on the remnants of our past.  
We see the dry bones, and we doubt in our minds—“Will these bones ever live?”

**People:** **But in the midst of our doubt,  
we proclaim that you are the life-giving Spirit.  
You breathe new life into all that is dead.**

*Reader 1: For you, O God, raised up the dry bones in the valley.*

*Reader 2: Your Son, Jesus, brought Lazarus out from the tomb,*

*Reader 3: and your Spirit lifted anew the hearts of the disciples.*

Leader: Teach us, O Lord, to wait for your breath.

**All:** ***Blow your mighty wind into the hollow chambers of our hearts,  
that we may never settle for death  
but rise again as your beloved people.***  
*(Pause for silent confession)*

Leader: God, holy Breath,

**All:** ***restore us.***

Leader: But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you, once more. Our whole selves waited for you, O Lord, and you answered us. In you there is unfailing love and full redemption. You redeem us from all our sins. Amen.

## Sermon seeds

In this fifth week of our Lenten journey, we may be feeling that the way is serious and heavy. If we allow them to, the Scripture stories this week offer levity and joy.

The story from Ezekiel fires our imagination. Imagine the power and joy of this enlivening Spirit that breathes life into a valley of hopeless, old, dead bones. There is something fun, surprising, and energizing about this image. God's Spirit is able to bring life out of the most hopeless terrain. The Spirit's work is joyful, astounding, wonderful! How often are we stuck in dust and deadness, unable to see what the Spirit wants to do? How might the Spirit be ready to bring our dead communities back to life?

The story of Lazarus's death is one of human drama with plenty of grief and tears. Even Jesus cries and is deeply moved at the death of Lazarus and the grieving of his friends. Still, this story ends in glory and joy. Lazarus is raised from the dead. His community is urged to take off the graveclothes, thereby freeing Lazarus into his new life. Hope abounds! Grief is turned to joy. The community is offered the opportunity to come to life and to be restored.

What kind of imagination and trust will it take for us to name the bleak valleys where we are dead, and wait with anticipation for the Spirit of God to breathe us into life? These stories celebrate God's redemptive action in the midst of our lifelessness. What is dead can spring forth into new life.

## Benediction

Go, breathing deeply of the Spirit who inspires life into all that is lifeless. Go enlivened, invigorated, refreshed. Amen.