

Good morning everyone! And welcome to our third Sunday Mt. Zion-line online worship video! I can hardly believe it's been three weeks since we began worshipping together in this online format, and I want to thank you all again for your creativity and for joining in on this new way of worshipping during this time of global pandemic.

One of the things that's been fun for each of these weeks of Sunday worship is that I feel like we graduate to a new level of online experience each week - beginning with prayers, scripture, and a sermon, last week we had a special guest reader and some choral music, and this week, I think we have officially graduated to the 2 or 300 level of worship video! We have a couple of special guests and familiar, friendly faces that will be part of our worship experience today, and I'm so excited and grateful that we can gather more folks together to be part of our worship videos.

We also have some great plans in the works for Holy Week, which begins next Sunday with Palm Sunday! I can't wait for you to see what we have planned! We will communicate our full Holy Week schedule in this week's Weekly Word email update, which will be sent to your email inboxes every Monday while we are physically distanced. If you have not been receiving our church emails, or would like to join our email list, please email our secretary Anna at [secretary@mtzionhudson.com](mailto:secretary@mtzionhudson.com). Her email address is also on our website, [mtzionhudson.com](http://mtzionhudson.com), along with full transcripts of all our worship videos and links to previous week's worship experiences.

So now I would love to begin our worship this morning with a word of prayer, so please join me as we pray:

*Almighty God, your Son came into the world to free us all from sin and death. Breathe upon us the power of your Spirit, that we may be raised to new life in Christ. Be present with us as we journey through the feelings of grieving and all the emotions that we experience during this challenging time. Help us to serve you in righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

Our first special guest this morning will provide for us the first and second readings for worship today ! So please say hello to Judy Meincke!

(cut to scripture reading video)

Our first reading is Ezekiel 37:1-14.

*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, 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."*

*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 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.*

*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.*

Our Second Reading is Romans 8:6-11.

*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.*

Thank you again, Judy, for ministering to us with reading God's Word!

Especially as we are coming to the close of Lent and into Holy Week, being able to dwell in the stories of Christ, the stories that lay the foundation of our faith is important. So while the scripture readings for the last couple of weeks certainly have been lengthy, I invite you to dwell

in the words of these stories and enjoy the time remembering the power of God and how God works in our world, through Jesus and beyond.

So with that, I invite you to dwell in the words of our Gospel story today, John 11:1-45, the raising of Lazarus.

*Now 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 upward 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.*

The Word of the Lord.

One of the things I've seen circulating around the internet over the past couple of weeks that I dearly love is a post called "self-care bingo". It's a bingo card set up with various self care activities in each box, friendly reminders of the basic things we need in order to take care of ourselves, no matter what is going on in the world around us, but especially in the midst of a crisis, a global pandemic. Some of these self-care activities include taking a shower, drinking water, eating food, and getting outside, which may seem straightforward, but sometimes we need friendly reminders to do these helpful and live-giving things.

And some of the self-care activities are a little more mentally intense, like tried something new, used a coping skill, challenged negative thoughts, or practiced self-compassion. These activities dig deep, and get at the reality that our mental and spiritual health can be at risk in this time of social distancing too. We may feel cut off from others if we are especially used to seeing folks in

person. We may feel isolated, which can exacerbate negative thoughts, like those associated with anxiety or depression. We may feel sad or full of grief for the things we will not be able to do. And we may not all be filled with joy when we're in cloudy, rainy weather - I suppose my love of this weather comes simply with the territory of being an Anglophile - you learn to love the rain.

But one of the main self-care activities that is really sticking with me from this card, is "felt my feelings". Sitting with your feelings and just feeling your way through them. We have a wide array of feelings that come and go for us in this unprecedented time, and it's okay to have a wide range of feelings even on a single day. We can be grateful for the extra time with family and feel joy at being present with our partners, spouses, kids, pets, whoever we're with these days. And we can also be sad that we can't meet up with our friends beyond just whom we live with, our dining groups or book clubs or the groups of parents that hang out while our kids are at sports practice or rehearsals. We can be angry and frustrated that we have to completely rearrange our lives and homes and work and finances and schedules and at such a quick pace too. And sometimes we can just be numb for all those same reasons, we're overwhelmed with information and how to cope in this entirely unprecedented, global situation.

Part of why I wanted to read and dwell in the entirety of our Gospel story today is because there are a lot of people feeling all kinds of feelings throughout the journey of this story. We see the very human aspects of Jesus in dealing with feelings, grief, sadness, and weeping, as well as gratitude, confidence, and curiosity. The people around Jesus feel all these things too, with the emotional climax of grief and Lazarus' subsequent healing. Upon recognizing the radical healing and new life that Lazarus was given, people could not help but believe that Jesus was the Son of God. What joy we can find in the new life that Christ brings for all of us. And what a rollercoaster of emotions we are on throughout this story.

We are often encouraged to let go of bad feelings. We aren't always used to being around folks who are sad or angry or weeping. The people around us who love us don't want to see us in states of difficult feelings because it's hard to be around folks when they're experiencing sadness or apathy or other feelings that are challenging for everyone involved. So many things we see advertised and promoted throughout our society simply exist to alleviate bad feelings or discomfort of any kind, especially mental discomfort.

But we have to recognize that feeling through these deep and difficult feelings leads us to the entire spectrum of depth of feeling. We have to name that the bones are dead in order to be filled with the complete joy of the spirit who breathes new life into them. We have to realize that Lazarus was actually dead, physically dead, throwing those who loved him into a state of weeping and grief to realize how absolutely and completely, in every sense of the word miraculous it was that Jesus raised Lazarus to life once again. Feeling through the complete depth of our feelings leads us to great joy and the journey of getting to that joy is what we call hope. Hope is never dead. Hope in Christ is never misplaced. And hope for a world much healthier and better-connected and fully appreciated is what will get us through this global

pandemic.

If Jesus can feel through his feelings, then we certainly can feel our feelings too. Some days may just be days of feeling through difficult feelings and that's okay. No feelings are bad or shameful - they simply are. And no feeling we ever have is ever judged or unknown by God. God, in Jesus Christ, knows exactly what it is to be human and the whole range of feelings and experiences that entails. As we know from today's Gospel story, Jesus wept. Jesus was overcome with feelings of grief for Lazarus, whom he loved, and he wept. So we too can spend some time weeping. Sometimes we just need a hot moment of weeping and then we're okay and that's okay too. Sometimes we are absolutely filled to the brim with joy all day long and praise the Lord for those days that give us joy and hope. And most days we are somewhere in between and that's okay too. Your feelings are valid. Your feelings and your heart are known and loved by God. God is with you in all your feelings and loves you deeply. And the people around you, the body of Christ of which we are all part, love you too and want to support you no matter what your feelings may be.

Thinking back to the self-care bingo card, the most important thing is at the center of the card. And no, it's not just a free space. The center of the card is "stayed alive". I stayed alive today. I felt through a range of things and did a range of things with my physical body to support being alive today. And sometimes that is the greatest victory we can give ourselves. The promises of life are always found in Christ. Even if feeling alive means feeling through some really difficult feelings, if we are feeling, we are living. We are made alive by the power of the Holy Spirit and that life is given to us by God our creator. The same spirit that animated those bones so long ago animates our spirits now and gives us life eternal.

This life given to us by God and the power of the Holy Spirit is what our hope is rooted in. Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' death and rising to new life. There may be pain in the night, but joy comes in the morning. We may not always feel that joy, but we can rest in the sure promises of hope that will always guide our spirits home to Christ, who gives us new life. Thanks be to God, Amen.

In this spirit of life and hope, I invite you all now to dwell in hopeful peace as we listen to our very own senior choir director, Craig Gustafson, perform the hymn "XXXX".

Thank you for your ministry of music, Craig!

Let us now join together and pray for the church, those in need, and all of God's creation:

*God of life, you weep with those who grieve. Unbind all who are held captive by anxiety, despair, or pain, especially those who are combatting the covid-19 illness, folks who are sick in any way, and all their loved ones who are unable to be physically present during their illness. Fill us with compassion and empathy for those who struggle, and keep us faithful in prayer. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

*God of love, we give you thanks for the many ways in which we are blessed. Thank you for the wide range of gifts and callings that we are able to provide the world, activated by your Spirit. Lord, in this time of pandemic, we are especially grateful for all the folks who are on the front lines of combatting this virus - healthcare workers, grocery and pharmacy workers, custodial and housekeeping workers, mail and deliver workers, emergency services and dispatchers, all people working in essential services, and all folks who are stepping up in generosity to help our neighbors in need. Lord we pray that the generosity activated in us now will continue as this pandemic plays out, and into the world even beyond this time of illness and distancing. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

*God of creation, you love the world you have made and you grieve when creation suffers. Restore polluted lands and waterways. Heal areas of the world ravaged by storms, floods, wildfires, droughts, and other natural disasters. As we see signs of spring green and rain for our fields and crops, we recognize our blessings and praise you Lord, as you bring all things to new life. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

*God of hope, as we experience a wide range of feelings and states of mental health, we pray for your peace and the everlasting hope found only in you. We pray to you in all states of feeling, we pray for your light amidst the darkness, we praise you in joy at the hope found in new life, we pray for your comfort and peace as we adjust our whole lives. Lord we remember too all the people experiencing hardships in our community, who we lift to you by name: Steve and Gloria, Karen, Neal, Lon, Caitlyn, Judi, George, Walt, Rich, Ole, Pam, Vera, Jim, Becky, Stacy, Nickki, Emily, Dianna, Judy, Dodie, Rebecca, Terry, Chad, Mark and Marge, Sandy, Barb, Laura, and Gwen. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

*God of creativity, we give you thanks for the technological advances that allow us to connect even in these times of social distancing. Thank you for reliable internet, video recording capabilities, email, video chat technology, and all the other creative ways we are able to connect in a time that could otherwise be very isolating. Help us to be patient and curious as we discover new ways to connect with the help of these gifts. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

*Into your hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy and peace. Through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, Amen.*

And now dear friends in Christ, may the Lord bless you and keep you, may God's face shine upon you and be gracious to you, may God look upon you with favor, and give you peace. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

As we did last week, I invite you to close out your time in worship while we are blessed by the musical gifts of our Mt. Zion Senior Choir. (sung Amen is played)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.