

March 22, 2026—The Fifth Sunday in Lent
The Rev. James Wyatt

Out of the Depths

“Out of the depths have I called to you; O God, hear my voice... My soul waits for you, more than sentries for the morning, more than sentries for the morning.” Many of you have heard me say before that the thing that got me through the years of the COVID pandemic was the practice of daily Morning Prayer, and in particular, praying the Psalms every morning. Because all the fear and grief and anger and uncertainty I was feeling during those years—and I’m often feeling still—they’re all there in the Psalms as well. Praying the Psalms gives me words to express the depths of my emotions—more than that, the Psalms give me permission to *pray* all that, to lay all those negative feelings at the feet of God. The Psalms give voice to my desolation, my abandonment, my despair, my demands for God to hear and have mercy on this broken world. And the Psalms speak back to me words of hope, and faith, and comfort: “I wait for you, O God; my soul waits for you; in your word is my hope... O Israel, wait upon God, for with God there is mercy.”

When we are at our best, our faith is like that: It is honest and realistic enough to look without flinching at the world around us, even when it is a stinking dumpster fire, to peer into the depths of human misery and all our brutality and the hardness of our hearts. And, again, when we’re at our best, our faith gives us hope that is just as honest, just as realistic—not empty promises, not vague platitudes, but hope that sustains us and transforms us, and through us, transforms the world.

“Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.” That’s how the people of Israel felt in their exile, their captivity in Babylon. Hundreds of miles from the charred remains of the Temple in Jerusalem, they felt like they were hundreds of miles from God—cut off, dried up, hopeless. That is an honest, unflinching look at the reality of a terrible situation: After a brutal war, leaving the numberless dead strewn across the valleys, Babylon triumphed completely. Anyone who might have claimed to rule or lead the vanquished people of Israel was carried off into exile, into a foreign land. And in the midst of that harsh reality, God spoke to Ezekiel—God spoke words of hope. God said, “O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord... I will cause breath to enter you—my Holy Spirit will blow through you—and you shall live.” That was not a vague platitude. It was a promise, a promise that was fulfilled after sixty years of exile, when the people of Israel were finally allowed to return and rebuild Jerusalem and its temple. The hope conveyed by the words of Ezekiel sustained the people in exile and transformed them, so that they and their descendants, decades later, could restore what had been so terribly lost—so they could transform the world.

And then our Gospel lesson this morning offers a similar expression of grief and despair, a similar cry from the depths. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Mary and Martha both throw these accusatory words at Jesus’ feet. Those are powerful words! They say so much: Where were you? Why weren’t you here? And, at the same time, I have enough faith in you and your miraculous power to know that you could have healed him! But the bitter reality is that he *did* die, he’s rotting in the tomb even while his sisters confront Jesus, and Mary and Martha are grieving and hurt and angry. And they’re still holding on to just enough faith and hope to go out and talk to Jesus and see what he has to say for himself.

And Jesus is honest and realistic enough to look without flinching at the depths of grief felt by these two mourning sisters, and to weep with them, because their grief is his grief, their pain is his pain, they live in the same bitter, broken world that he loves so dearly. And then he offers hope to Martha: “Your brother will rise again.” And at first Martha thinks he’s offering another one of those empty platitudes she’s no doubt heard a thousand times already, and she snaps back at him, “I know he’ll rise again at the resurrection, but I’m missing him *now*.” And Jesus responds, “No, you don’t understand. I *am* the resurrection. I’m not talking about the last day. I’m right here. Right now.” This is hope that sustains and transforms—hope that is strong

enough to roll away the stone and transformative enough to stir Lazarus back to life, to unbind him and let him go.

Jesus' words are a promise that our hope for the future—our hope for a world remade, with all its dumpster fires extinguished, our hope for tears wiped from our eyes and an end to all our mourning and crying and pain—that hope is also a present reality. Jesus says, "*I am* that future you are hoping for, and the life that is in me I am sharing with you, even now."

We recognize that not as a platitude but as a promise—we experience the life Jesus is sharing with us now, the transformation the Holy Spirit is working within us, the comfort of God's presence with us and among us even now. That doesn't remove the reality of the world on fire around us. It doesn't erase our desolation, our grief, our despair. We are still here, crying out—"Out of the depths have I called to you; O God, hear my voice;" "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely;" "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." We still see the world as it is—war-ravaged, full of violence and greed and hatred and grief and death—and we see the world as it can be, as, in God's glorious future, it will be.

To have either one without the other will lead us astray: If we see only the dumpster-fire of the world without hope, without the promise of the presence of God, without a taste of God's promised future, that way lies utter despair. I suspect that's what Paul was getting at when he said, "to set the mind on the flesh is death.... the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God." Looking unflinchingly at the reality of the world but failing to see the work of the Holy Spirit in the midst of that broken world is to pitch your tent among the dry bones in the valley of all those slain, and never hear a breath of wind blow with its promise of new life.

On the flip side, if we see only the promise of God's future, we delude ourselves about the reality of the world around us. Pretending the world isn't on fire, pretending that the misery around us is all an illusion, or, worst of all, blaming people who are in pain for the suffering they're experiencing, as if all they need is a little more faith to transcend all that pain—none of that is helpful. That's the path of empty platitudes and pie-in-the-sky promises. And if we pretend not to see the suffering of the people around us, then we can't really love the people around us, and we can't serve the people around us.

Our faith helps us see the world as it is—in all its beauty and misery—and helps us hope for the world as it can be. When we can hold those two things together, we are transformed by the Spirit working in us. We can see the places in the world that need us, our love and our care, and we can go to those places to bring hope to hurting people. Transformed by the Spirit, kissed by the breath of God and given new life, we are called forth to transform the world.

Thanks be to God.