

Two weeks ago, when we reflected on Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman, we named the difference between desperation and despair.

Desperation is the urgent response to crisis when options feel exhausted—but hope still flickers.

Despair is the loss of hope itself—the quiet, heavy belief that nothing will change.

The Samaritan woman was desperate, but not without hope. She could still say, “I know that Messiah is coming.” And in that moment, Jesus revealed himself to her, and her life was changed.

Today’s texts, however, take us deeper—into true despair.

In Ezekiel, we are brought into a valley of dry bones—bleached, brittle, lifeless. This is not just death; it is long-settled death. These bones represent Israel in exile: a people displaced, stripped of identity, and unsure whether God was still with them. Generations had passed. Hope had faded. They were not just desperate—they were done.

Into that despair, God speaks.

Ezekiel is told to prophesy—to speak God’s word into what is clearly lifeless. Flesh appears, but there is still no life. So God commands him again: call the breath. And when the breath comes, the people live.

Life begins with the breath of God.

John's gospel gives us a parallel scene. Lazarus has been dead four days. By every understanding of the time, there is no possibility of life. As Martha says, there is only decay. This is not desperation. This is final.

And yet Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Notice how this happens. Jesus does not act alone. He tells the community to roll away the stone. Then he calls Lazarus by name: "Lazarus, come out." And Lazarus does—but still bound.

So Jesus gives one more command: "Unbind him, and let him go."
The community must participate in his restoration.

In both stories, God brings life out of death—but not without human participation. The prophet speaks. The community moves the stone. The community unbinds what was once dead.

And at the center of it all is breath—God's breath, the same breath given to us in baptism, the promise that God's Spirit is never withdrawn, even when hope is.

But before the miracle, there is something else: Jesus weeps.

Jesus stands in the presence of grief and does not rush past it. He enters it. He feels it. He weeps with those who mourn.

I know there are several of you who have gone through personal loss recently. People whom you loved, who will not be coming back in bodily form. In Jesus' reaction to the grieving all around him over the death of Lazarus – whom Jesus loved – his heart of compassion is so overwhelmed that it spills over in tears.

As Jesus weeps for this grieving community, Jesus also weeps for you. For your pain; for your loss; for the hole in your life left by those who were part of your own formation. The promise of life does not erase grief. It meets us within it. The One who raises the dead is also the One who weeps with us.

This is where God's glory is revealed: not only in bringing life out of death, but in dispelling despair—restoring hope where none seemed possible.

The valley is not the end.

The tomb is not the end.

Despair is not the end.

The community must participate in *our* restoration.

The God who breathes life into dry bones and calls the dead by name is still at work—still breathing, still calling, still restoring.

So we breathe in, and breathe out, trusting that even now, God is bringing life where we cannot yet see it.

And we follow Jesus—toward Jerusalem, toward the cross, and ultimately toward resurrection.

Amen.