

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

Week Five

Prepare

Take a moment to center yourself for communion with God. You may do so by lighting a candle, signifying the presence of the Spirit with you, singing a hymn, saying a prayer, or simply sitting in silence before God. Invite the Holy Spirit to come and speak to you through these words of Scripture and time of meditation and reflection.

Read

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Additional Scriptures for this week: Psalm 130, Romans 8:6-11, John 11:1-45

Reflect

This week, our Scripture passages move to the theme which the season of Lent is slowly building towards: resurrection. In all of the readings, we find themes of life and death, forgiveness and sin. In Christ's body on the cross, which we partake of each time we break the bread of communion, life and death come together. We remember Christ's physical death; yet we rejoice in his glorious resurrection. We reflect upon the death our humanity and sins bring; yet we experience new life and forgiveness in Christ.

In the passage from Ezekiel, we find a strange story, full of haunting images of dried bones being raised up out of a valley and put together with new flesh. It is difficult to discern what all of this means at first, but that is part of the nature of the prophecies of the Old Testament. Though these men had strange visions that often didn't make sense to the people around them, and still perplex us today, that was the vehicle God used to bring God's voice of justice and truth amidst a broken world.

The image of resurrection that is prophesied by Ezekiel is a vision of God's people being restored from their place of brokenness and exile. Throughout much of the Old Testament, these Israelites cannot seem to get their act together. It seems that once things start to go well, they mess up again in a new way. But, alongside this theme of brokenness, there are also voices of redemption and restoration. Through the cries of prophets like Ezekiel, they remember who they are and the reason they had to hope. This story is our story.

Unlike the Israelites, we have not only seen the fulfillment of their covenant with God in Christ but also experienced the profound hope of his resurrection. This is an incredible gift. But, like the people of Israel, we are prone to forget who we are as children of God and how we must follow Christ's example of living in this world. The need for prophetic voices is still very much alive, as they call out the injustices of this world and inspire us to do the same. They help us to see our blind spots and work to bring in the kingdom of God on earth, as it is in heaven.

Though there often seems to be more darkness and injustice to cry out against than light to celebrate, we must not forget the promise that Christ is alive and working even in our broken world. In last week's devotional, we learned about the radical love that Zoe's Ruhashaya Working Group extended



by adopting 89 other orphans as their own. One of these adopted boys was named Theogene who had spent most of his 18 years of life alone and begging for food. He lived homeless on the streets, and was often beaten and abused by those who saw him as inferior and would not pay him for his labor. Theogene said many times he simply wished to die; his life was void of hope.

Then, when he met a fellow orphan of the Ruhashaya Working Group, he was befriended with dignity and respect. Theogene was taken into the group, and was amazed by the ability of his brothers and sisters in Christ to pull themselves out of poverty and find joy despite the great suffering that they had experienced in life. Theogene found hope even amidst the darkness of his circumstances, thanks to the Zoe orphans who showed him the love of Christ by taking him in and helping him achieve freedom from poverty and injustices. Theogene was able to buy a pig, and said it brought him incredible joy to see it give birth to six piglets, three of whom he gave away to other orphans. Theogene's story is no longer one of darkness and despair, but of light, a light that he seeks to share to other people.

Reflection questions:

1. God longs for justice and goodness to come to all people, and longs for us to follow Ezekiel's example in bringing those things to earth. What injustices in your own community are you passionate about? In the world?
2. In what ways can you use words to speak out against injustices in our world? In what ways can you use actions?

Pray

Respond by speaking or writing out a prayer to God, or use the prayer below as a starting point:

Righteous God, Lord of all justice, we thank you for the great gift of your Word, and the ways your Spirit uses it in our lives. Thank you for the ways it guides and challenges our perceptions of justice, and helps us to recognize the prophetic voice of those we might otherwise be tempted to dismiss. Help us to have ears that hear those voices, and give us the courage to act on them to bring justice to your people and our world. In Jesus' name we ask these things. Amen.

Act

The opportunities for enacting justice in our local communities, in our nation, and in our world are too many to count. This can at times be overwhelming, but we must not let it paralyze us or prevent us from living into our calling to follow Christ. Instead, it is helpful to remember that God is bigger than all of the problems we see and does not expect us to solve it all on our own! God has given us each unique gifts, equipping us to face the injustices of our world that meet our deepest passions. If you are not sure where your passion lies or how it might be put into action, spend some time praying about this. Have conversations with family and friends about what gifts they see in you and how those might be utilized to glorify God. Explore ministries within your church, organizations in your community, or even local lobbying groups that might already be working to bring the justice you are called to support.

Learn

To learn more about Zoe Empowers and the ways our organization partners with orphans in Africa, visit www.zoempowers.org!