

**Sunday, April 6, 2014**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon**

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Wow! Wow! What else can be said when you hear of divine breath being breathed into dry bones and life being commanded into dead bodies.

This is the power of God on display – showing off a bit to send a message to the downtrodden, to those whose faith is weak.

In both Ezekiel's valley and Lazarus' tomb we are told that there is no despair so deep that God cannot redeem it.

If God can make the dry bones of Ezekiel's vision rattle back together and return to life, God can quicken us as well.

If God can break down the barriers that cut us off and give us a new start and a restored life; we have every reason to hope.

If God can put our lives together when they have fallen apart, we can hold fast, face our future with faith, and move on.

Today's readings invite us into God's kingdom, where the rules are different than we expect – different than we know.

We can only enter this world by faith.

Reason will block the door.

A story like this reminds us that Jesus was fully human – weeping at his friend's sorrow; but also fully divine – able to resurrect a dead man and restore life.

We share in Jesus' humanity – we too cry when a friend dies.

We do not share in his divinity.

We cannot raise the dead from their graves or give new life to old bones.

We can, however be recipients of divine action.

Our old bones can receive God's divine breath and we can face the world renewed and restored.

What if God showed up in your life and removed all of the things that bind you?

What if God said to you, Wake up – Come out into the world

Leave all of your preconceived ideas behind.

Take off the cloth that keeps you from joy in your life.

Abandon the constraints of expectations, judgments, disappointments.

Walk away from addictions and depression; loneliness and despair.

Well, God does that.

God does invite you into his realm where only God has the power to transform lives – even from death.

It is curious to me that both readings end with the miracle of life.  
I want to know what happens next.

Where did those multitudes of bone people go?

What did Lazarus do with his new found life?

What would you do?

A recent article in the New York Times explored the concept of wisdom.

Wisdom is characterized by one professor as a “reduction in self-centeredness;”

Wise people try to understand situations from multiple perspectives, not just their own, and they show tolerance as a result.

Most psychologists agree that if you define wisdom as maintaining positive well-being and kindness in the face of challenges, it is one of the most important qualities one can possess to age successfully — and to face physical decline and death.

This says to me that when God shows up and offers you new life in the face of death; joy in the face of despair; goodness in the face of evil – it is imperative that you embrace the possibility of transformation.

Yesterday we had a memorial service for Alvord Beardslee.

Most of you knew Alvord as the genteel man who sat over there –

the occasional preacher, the charming intellect.

But Alvord was much more.

Alvord was such a special man. The words that I think of to describe him: kind, thoughtful, humble, intelligent, spiritual – these don’t seem like enough.

For Alvord, I am drawn to the words he loved so well, the words of scripture.

*The Spirit of the Lord was upon Alvord – he was a holy man;*

*Alvord gave garlands instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.*

*He gave food to the hungry; drink to the thirsty; he welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick and visited those in prison.*

*Alvord was convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, would be able to separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

I believe that God places people on our paths to remind us of the goodness in all of creation, of the possibilities for greatness, for holiness. Alvord Beardslee was one such man.

He lived as an example to the rest of us.

He showed us that deep faith and vibrant intellect can coexist;

that compassion and justice are interwoven;

that humility and humor enrich every relationship.

Alvord was a wise man – one who possessed wisdom.

Lazarus has also been placed on our path.

Lazarus stands as an example, just as Alvord did, that God's promise is true.

Today, I invite you to free yourself of the things that bind you.

Let the life-giving breath of the Spirit blow through you.

Trust that Jesus wants what is best for you.

He calls you out of the darkness and into the bright light of Easter.

Resurrection is ours – just look outside.

What was dead – is now bursting with life.

Flowers, leaves, birds, sunlight – all examples of God's amazing power of both creation and recreation.

God never stops.

It didn't matter to Jesus that he was four days late in bringing life to Lazarus –

It didn't matter to Ezekiel that those dry bones had been in that valley a long time.

When life is offered to you – wake up; come out; start dancing!

Next week is Palm Sunday – a day when Jesus will be joyfully welcomed into Jerusalem – lauded as a king.

I invite you to listen to the following poem and use it as a point of reflection for the week ahead:

**The Coming by R.S. Thomas**

And God held in his hand  
A small globe. Look he said.  
The son looked. Far off,  
As through water, he saw  
A scorched land of fierce  
Colour. The light burned  
There; crusted buildings  
Cast their shadows: a bright  
Serpent, A river  
Uncoiled itself, radiant  
With slime.  
On a bare  
Hill a bare tree saddened  
The sky. Many people  
Held out their thin arms  
To it, as though waiting  
For a vanished April  
To return to its crossed  
Boughs. The son watched  
Them. Let me go there, he said.