

## CONNECT GROUP – MARCH 23, 2026

### Introduction and welcome

Everyone is welcome whenever you can attend.

### Opening prayer (Collect from March 22 service)

Creator God, you prepare a new way in the wilderness and water the desert. Help us to recognize your hand working miracles beyond our imagining. Open our hearts to be transformed by the new thing you are doing, so that our lives may proclaim the extravagance of your love for all, and its presence in Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

### Sharing – how things are going for each of us

This is a time to share what is happening with us, if people are comfortable doing this.

### Excerpt from 1<sup>st</sup> reading of March 22 (Dry Bones) Ezekiel 37:4–10

<sup>4</sup> Then he [the Lord] said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. <sup>5</sup> Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup> 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.” <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, 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.” <sup>10</sup> I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

### Excerpts from Gospel reading of March 22 (Death of Lazarus) John 11:17–45

<sup>17</sup> When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. <sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, <sup>19</sup> and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. <sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” <sup>24</sup> Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” <sup>27</sup> She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” <sup>28</sup> 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.” ...<sup>32</sup> 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.” <sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. <sup>34</sup> He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him,

“Lord, come and see.”<sup>35</sup> Jesus began to weep.<sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”<sup>37</sup> But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.<sup>39</sup> 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 for four days.”<sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”<sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me.<sup>42</sup> 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.”<sup>43</sup> When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”<sup>44</sup> 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.”<sup>45</sup> Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

### Discussion points

- The Ezekiel reading prompts us to review the valleys of our own lives, and to examine those dry, desolate, and even dead places
- What is the main message in the Ezekiel reading?
- Jesus didn't come to Martha and Mary right away when he got the message that Lazarus was ill. What is the message of the delay for God's timing in our lives?
- What does Jesus' love for Martha, Mary and Lazarus say to us?
- In verse 41, Jesus looks up and thanks the Father. Are we thankful enough in our prayers?
- What other messages do these passages have for us?

### Commentary from one preacher

We worship a God of resurrection, even though we ourselves may be in valleys of dry bones or tombs of darkness. The good news is, to these difficult places where hope seems lost and all seems to be at an end, God gives us life-giving breath. As we enter these final days of Lent, let us take that breath, and ask God to renew our spirits. Let us remember that God breathes even into the most difficult places in our lives, and offers hope. Our breath can become our prayer, heightening our awareness of God's presence in our lives.

### Closing blessing (from March 22 service)

Into whatever wilderness the Spirit leads you, walk in boldness, as a beloved child of God; walk in peace, under the shelter of the Most High; walk in faith, knowing Christ walks with you. And may the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, be upon you, help you, and change you as we walk with the Lord during this season of Lent. **Amen.**