

“Rhythm, Ruts & Ruac”
Ezekiel 37:1-14; John 11:1-45

Rev. Kenneth M. Locke, Pastor/Head of Staff
First Presbyterian Church, Fond du Lac, WI
March 26, 2023; Fifth Sunday of Lent

You know that feeling you have when life is going well? You like what you do. Your relationships are healthy. Your life has rhythm. We all know that feeling. Our life is animated. There’s a sparkle in our eye. Life’s got rhythm, and it feels good.

But sometimes, sometimes, that rhythm gets out of whack. Life is harried. Relationships grow stale. We like what we do but it’s wearing us down. We’ve lost that vibrant, animated feeling. We’re in a rut. There’s no spark, no breath. We’re just shuffling along, skin and bones, in a rut.

If you don’t know what I mean, go to a mall and wander around. Back in the fall I went to the Mall of America in Bloomington, MN. Supposed to be the largest mall in America. Fantastic place. I’d never seen a mall with a rollercoaster before. This one had three. Three rollercoasters under one roof. Pretty cool.

I was amazed, though, at how many people were listless. When they stopped to look at a store, their eyes never lit up. They never had an excited conversation with anyone. They were just skin and bones, shuffling through the mall.

Where was the spark? Where was the animating force? Where can we get that twinkle in our eye, the breath in our lungs? When we’re in a rut, how can we get our rhythm back?

There are lots of answers, but the best answer is drawing close to God. When our lives are in a rut, there’s a good chance we’ve wandered away from God.

In our Old Testament Lesson, the Israelites are in exile in Babylon. They’re far from home. Strangers in a strange land. Spiritually depressed. They’ve lost their rhythm. The entire nation is in a rut.

The prophet Ezekiel, in Babylon with the people, has a vision. By God’s Spirit he is carried to a huge valley full of dry bones. The word *Spirit* here is *ruac*. Remember that word, *ruac*. God talks to

Ezekiel and Ezekiel prophesies to the bones. They start connecting, bone to bone. They grow flesh. A mighty multitude. But they're not alive. They have no breath. They're just skin and bones.

Again, God talks to Ezekiel and again Ezekiel prophesies, but this time he prophesies to the breath. And what do you know, the word for God's breath is also *ruac*. Ruac. God's Spirit, God's breath, God's ruac, is the spark of life. God's ruac is their animating force. God's ruac puts a twinkle in their eye.

It's God's ruac, God's breath, God's Spirit, that's going to raise up this valley of dry bones and take them back to their homeland. God's ruac.

Friend, are you tired of being in rut? Are you tired of walking around, doing what you do, day in and day out, but there's no animating force, no spark in your life, no twinkle in your eye, no ruac? Friend, are you tired of living without ruac?

Then turn to God. Turn to God. When we're tired of living in a rut, turn back to God and breath deep of God's ruac.

God wants us to. God wants us to live lives of joyful rhythm. In Jesus, God wants to bring us all, as a people and as individuals, back to life. God wants us to know the joy of ruac flowing through our lungs and our spirits.

Our New Testament lesson is about Lazarus. But it's also about us. It's about ruac in our lives.

By now we know what to expect. We've seen it with Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the man born blind. People talking past each other. The subject at hand is not what really matters. It's a way of getting to something deeper.

In this instance, our story is about physical death but it's really about spiritual death, about people who have no ruac. And, it's about Jesus: the resurrection and the life. It's about finding our life's rhythm in Jesus.

Just as Jesus calls Lazarus back to life, Jesus is calling us back to life. Jesus is calling us to breath deep of God's ruac and live. Jesus is calling us to breath deep of God's loving Spirit and get out of our rut and live lives of joyful, joyful rhythm.

It's a good message and we need to hear it. Jesus is calling us back to life. Embrace God's ruac. Get out of our rut and find our joyful rhythm in life. But it also poses a question. A very hard question. Do we have to? Do we have to?

Did Lazarus have to come back to life? He had to come out of the tomb. Jesus called him. But after he was out of the tomb and they took the bandages off, did he stop and wonder, 'Do I have to live? Do I have to breath God's ruac? Can I be like that crowd in the valley, just walking, talking, skin and bones? If I have to be alive, can I at least live in a rut?'

Do you think he paused and wondered? I don't know, but I do know it's a choice we all have. We don't have to breath God's ruac. We can keep our hearts and lungs closed, going through life in a rut, no rhythm, no joy, no sparkle in our eyes.

Or, we can open up. We can open our hearts and minds and souls and breath deep of God's ruac and live.

Friend, is life getting you down? Are you dragging along, no joy, no twinkle in your eye? Are you in a deep, deep rut.

Friend, God is calling. In Jesus, God is calling. In Jesus, God's ruac is swirling around us. Breath deep. Find the joyful rhythm. Breath deep and live as children of God.

Beloved, this is how much God loves us. Thanks be to God! Amen.