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## Never Ordinary

### Greetings everyone!

As we turn from the excitement of Pentecost last Sunday, where we gave thanks and praise for the Holy Spirit, in the Church of England we prepare for one last festival – that of Trinity Sunday. Once that is done next week we will enter the season known as Ordinary Time. Over the last sixteen months, we have seen ups and downs in our national life and local lives. There have been funerals and celebrations. There has been questioning, anger, love, and faithful service.

I have a longing for Ordinary Time, when life wends its way gently through normality. But God does not call us to stay as we are. We might have to wait for a period, but there will always be change to cope with and different ways of being to evolve. The apparently arid places conceal life underneath. Through the last sixteen months, we have all lived as best we can, and looked out for each other as best we can. Now it is time, not to return to normality, but to consider what we need to equip us for the next phase of life and to ask God what is now required of us.

The answer for each of us personally may take time to emerge – the Holy Spirit's whisperings may not be clear in our ear. We each may need help and support for the next steps – not only prayer but practically. How can we at the Arthur Rank Centre support you in your mission and ministry? What will help you?

Whatever you need, I leave you with the words of Micah 6:8

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?”

This comes with my love and prayers for you.

*Claire (on behalf of the Arthur Rank Centre team)*

## Can these bones live?

**Bible reading: Ezekiel 37:1-6** (whole reading Ezekiel 37:1-14)

*The Valley of Dry Bones*

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, ‘Mortal, can these bones live?’ I answered, ‘O Lord God, you know.’ Then he

said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 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.'

## Reflection

I suspect that many of us can relate to the image of dry bones! I know that there have been times over the last fifteen months when my life seems to have shrunk and shrivelled to a shadow of its pre-COVID-19 form.

I've been in the enormously privileged position of having a volunteering role – as chaplain to my local women's football team – which has meant that since July 2020 I've been able to meet with groups of other people in a COVID-safe environment. And there are, of course, lots of people – including healthcare professionals and those in the emergency services, teachers and supermarket workers, postal workers and delivery drivers – who have been physically working alongside their colleagues and the public for the duration of the pandemic.

But we all know that being physically present with other people is no guarantee of the depth of connection of relationship that are part of what makes us human. Many, many people will feel that this year of separation from friends and family, and the prohibitions on hugs and sharing meals together has left us feeling like we're merely existing.

Can these bones live?

And it feels like we are, once again, entering a liminal space in the outworking of COVID-19 on our communities here in the UK. On many levels, life is opening up and we are able to spend time with people in ways that have been closed to us for almost six months (in most parts of the UK).

And yet even today there are the early reminders that our return to 'normal' will not be straightforward, with residents of eight local areas in England (including Leicester, where I live) being asked to 'stay local' again as the COVID-19 variant that originated in India continues to cause infection rates to rise.

Can these bones live?

Today we are also reminded of the fragility of human life. As we continue to mourn and remember those who have died of COVID-19 over the last eighteen months, we also mark the first anniversary of the death of George Floyd, a black man killed by a white police officer in Minneapolis, sparking a racial justice movement in the USA that has had huge repercussions for our own nation.

Sometimes it can be hard to process the implications of a movement like Black Lives Matter for our rural communities, particularly when they've begun in huge cities on the other side of the world. But at its heart, this is a movement for justice, equity and compassion, things that our rural communities need as much as any other.

Can these bones live?

As we celebrated Pentecost in our rural churches and communities last weekend, we were reminded that the power to live the lives God has called us to – individually and as the family of God's people – comes not from us

but from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Today's reading reminds us, in visceral and evocative language, that God can and does bring life to the dry, the shrunken, the shrivelled:

'Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 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.' (Ezekiel 37:5-6)

Today, whether we are celebrating spending quality time with family, adjusting to new COVID-19 restrictions and mourning the loss of a loved one through COVID-19, old age, sickness or violence, Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones brought to life reminds us that the Holy Spirit equips us to face all this and more.

These bones can live.

## **Prayer**

Heavenly Father,  
we come to you with mixed emotions:  
excited at the prospect of time with friends and family,  
looking forward to shared meals and shared homes,  
anxious about what the future holds.  
We come to you celebrating, grieving, joyful and angry  
at the life and death we see around us.  
We come to you grateful that in all we face  
you walk alongside us.  
Give us the courage to respond with compassion  
to those who are hurting  
and to work for justice for those who are oppressed.  
In Jesus' name, amen.

## **Response**

*Take some time this week to reflect on how you're feeling about the current COVID situation.*

How are you feeling emotionally, spiritually, mentally and physically? What simple, practical steps could you take to improve how you're feeling in each of these areas?

*Take some time this week to think about the Christian call to compassion and justice.*

What are the implications of the Black Lives Matter movement in rural places? How do we acknowledge and listen to those who are not in the majority? What do ethnicity and racial differences mean in my place?

If you would like to explore issues of race, faith and the Church I would highly recommend reading [We need to talk about race by Ben Lindsay](#) and [God is not a white man by Chine McDonald](#) (published 27 May 2021).

*Louise Davis, Training Manager, Arthur Rank Centre*