

5/19/2024 (Pentecost)

Dry Bones?

Ezekiel 37:1-14 / Acts 2:1-21

Ezekiel's vision is so extreme! And yet it is not far-fetched. It sounds like a science fiction or horror movie. It reminds us of scientists who try to find DNA of extinct animals to bring them back into existence in a lab.

We are accustomed to similar sights, and don't have to move very far to find similar valleys of dry bones whether it is graves in Ukraine, lush mountain tops destroyed by strip mining, or deserts created by centuries of over-farming. There are similar valleys of dry bones of unwanted children who are aborted or ignored by parents who are too selfish or busy to be parents. We see the same in leaders who don't serve but seek only to enrich their own lives or churches that are little more than private clubs or meeting places.

Ezekiel used this vision to call Israel to account for a faith life that had lost its passion and was rotting on the vine. Jesus called his world to gaze at the same sight and entered into battle that He might change death's inevitable ending.

The vision of a valley of dry bones is not the end, but a beginning. In the miracle of Easter, which we celebrated again a few weeks ago, we remember how Jesus' dry bones were miraculously restored as he resumed a ministry of servant love. The miracle of Pentecost, which we remember today, was foreshadowed in a remarkable way with the raising of Lazarus, where Jesus finished the miracle by handing it over to disciples and telling them it was their opportunity to "unbind him and set him free." He brought them into the joy of that new life just as he does with us today.

Jesus has risen from the grave and called us to be his followers – but to what end? What difference will that make? Just as Israel's valley of dry bones had once been filled with the life of a miraculous Red Sea crossing and the theophany of Sinai, so our life is as fragile or strong as we choose to make it. Israel was restored to life in the desert, but abandoned God as soon as they found their land of Promise. We often cling to God in time of weakness and distress but often cease prayer and discipleship when life is full of what we feel we deserve. Everyone has new ideas for old problems or new opportunities. What is just as important as vision of new life is the God's breath to give power to the vision that it might become ministry!

If I am a Christian by the grace of God, then it is by the grace of God that I must live. My discipleship is not a right but a privilege, and as a member of God's family I will seek to fill my lungs and my living with the breath of his Holy Spirit. Bible study, worship, prayer, and stewardship of the gifts he has shared are not options but the life through which Jesus daily breathes into me! Just as God expected more of Israel because they knew He was God) so it is with us! Our future is in God's hands or ours. And we know which hands will guarantee success. We have only to look at the fringes of Israel (the unfaithful and the

Pharisees) to see where the life of that nation dried up. Those who didn't care or wouldn't listen to God turned their communities into valleys of dry bones.

Last fall orange and black striped wooly bear caterpillars crawled into the open to find a winter resting place. They curl up and are frozen under the bark of trees or fallen leaves. As the warmth of spring thawed them out, they came back to life, spun cocoons, and emerged from that hidden place as Tiger moths. Life that appeared dead was transformed by the miracle and energy of God's touch. Like a valley of dry bones come to life or a dead body raised from a tomb in Jerusalem, Ezekiel's vision is a blueprint for our present and future.

The same breath which God exhaled as "Let there be light...dry land and seas... birds and fish and all living things" has rushed into our world again! That same Spirit that filled the lungs of Adam and Eve and made them living beings fills us. The words which breathed "I am who I am" and took the shape of a pillar of cloud and fire to lead Israel to safety are in our midst today. God's Spirit – his creative breath and living presence are the gifts of grace which have changed our valley of dry bones into a paradise of life with God. Our God has restored what was lost. His life is the sweet breath, which we are called to exhale into the world around us. His love is our new song for daily living.

Certainly, the first disciples were scared! But they were in the right place at the right time. Not knowing HOW God would do it, they were ready for whatever he gave them. And when they opened the doors of that upper room and allowed the Gospel to touch the light of day, it lit a spark that changed the world.

Pentecost is a powerful reminder that God remains tied to us like umbilical cord to unborn child – and all of life is waiting for the true birth in the life to come! Paul reminds us (Rom 8) all creation is groaning in labor pains until now..." This life isn't the end that many want to make it ... it is the beginning that will deliver us into the life and world to come.

That is what today is all about, the breathless love of creation and the miracle of an empty tomb are God's gifts that pulse in our veins and empower our hearts and minds. We don't need to understand how our why God loves us but celebrate the faith, hope, and love that have been implanted as his gifts of love.

Jesus left his grave cloths in the tomb. Disciples held Lazarus unwind his own after Jesus breathed life back into him. And we too daily have our dry bones returned to life by the miracle of Easter. Like those disciples who had hidden themselves before Pentecost, but then changed the world, we are set free to change ours as well. We simply need to trust and share the life that God has given. It is never up to us, but through us, that Jesus' light shines!

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