

“Can these dry bones live?”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday March 29, 2020

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Ezekiel 37:1-14 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Valley of Dry Bones

37 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. ² He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³ He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord God, you know.” ⁴ Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. ⁵ Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath^[a] to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath^[b] in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

⁷ 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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath:^[c] Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath,^[d] and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” ¹⁰ I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

¹¹ Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ ¹² Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.”

Footnotes:

- a. [Ezekiel 37:5](#) Or *spirit*
- b. [Ezekiel 37:6](#) Or *spirit*
- c. [Ezekiel 37:9](#) Or *wind or spirit*
- d. [Ezekiel 37:9](#) Or *wind or spirit*

Can these dry bones live?

That was the Lord's question to Ezekiel who was faced with a whole valley of dry bones.



Can these dry bones live? asks the Lord.

“Only you know, O Lord” is the right answer.

If the dry bones are going to live who is the only one able to accomplish it?

The Lord.

Only God can make a heap of dry bones come together and come to life.

And then in front of Ezekiel's eyes the bones come together piece to piece, sinews and flesh appear and cover them.

And then the *ruach* the Spirit of God, the Spirit that hovered over the waters of chaos in creation, breathed into the bodies and they came to life.

The Lord said to Ezekiel; this valley of dry bones is like the whole house of Israel. The people are like dry bones – dead and scattered- they say; *“our bones are dried up, our hope is lost, and we are cut off completely.”*

God's word to Ezekiel is that God is going to bring new life, new hope, to a hopeless, and helpless people.

That seems to me to be a good word for today!

We know something about feeling hopeless, and helpless today.

We are certainly cut off from one another, and some folks might feel cut off from God.

If you listen to the news for long, we start to think that everything is hopeless, the world is falling apart; there is crisis everywhere.

“Our bones are dried up”

I don't know if anyone feels that way, but certainly there is a weariness, fear, anxiety and a shrivelling of our spirits that can happen in this time of uncertainty.

“Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost, and we are cut off completely.”

In that situation God asked Ezekiel- “Can these dry bones live?”

Is there hope for God's hopeless people?

Is there life for the weary, dry, fearful, anxious soul?

Is there a future, a hope, for life going forward?

Only you know, O Lord.

It is in God's hands.

We are in God's hands.

Picture yourself listening to the news, to the anxiety, the suffering, the deaths, and worry.

And God asks you: Is there hope for this world, in this time?

Answer with Ezekiel: Only you know, O Lord.

And then what is next?

What role does Ezekiel fill in this drama?

He is a supporting, responding character only.

God speaks to Ezekiel and he does as the Lord commands him, and he reports and gives voice to all that God does.

God is the main actor.

Ezekiel believes that God will act, he announces what God says he's going to do, and he watches all that God does.

Ezekiel doesn't arrange the bones in order for God, he doesn't try to do the reconnecting himself.

He waits on God, he follows God's command, and he is a witness to God's power.

In the midst of this pandemic, we are reminded that life and death are not in our hands.

God gives us today, and our future is in God's hands.

The other scripture for today is the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

Lazarus gets sick, Mary and Martha send for Jesus.

Jesus doesn't come right away.

Lazarus, Jesus' good friend, dies, and Jesus goes to the family.

Martha said to Jesus; *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."*

And for some time now, I've wondered if Martha was right.

Would Lazarus have died had Jesus been there?

Certainly Jesus could have healed him, but Jesus' presence with us is no guarantee against sickness or death.

With Jesus in our midst difficult things happen.

Jesus is walking with us day by day, but every single one of us is going to die.

Jesus went to the cross, in part because he raised Lazarus from the dead.

Death is a certainty.

But death is not the last word.

God, who hovered over the waters of chaos, God who is still the *ruach*, the one who was over the valley of dry bones, brings life where there is death.

The bones came together, and came to be living people, with hope and life, again.

Lazarus came out of the grave alive.

And on Easter Sunday we will all proclaim in one voice, that will echo around the world that the tomb is empty.

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed!

So we can live today in faith, in confidence, in hopefulness.

Because the God who raised dry scattered bones to life is over all today.

The God who brought Lazarus out of the tomb alive, is with us today and reigns over all things.

The God who raised Jesus from the grave and gives us life eternal, is over all things today.

So what does that mean for us, living in the midst of this pandemic?

Live wisely, but live.

Live, not responding to fear, but responding to God who is over all.

Live in confidence of God's love, in hopefulness for the good that God is going to accomplish in and through us, live in prayerfulness knowing that God brings life even in the midst of death.

Amen.