

Ezekiel 37:1-14

“And the Bones Came Together”

Two weeks before Easter the lectionary offers up two stories of revival and new life. The story of the raising of Lazarus, and that of Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones. Perhaps we can see this as a reminder that the resurrection is not a onetime occurrence in human history, but, in fact, a possibility in all times of crisis, suffering, and despair.



Ezekiel's story takes place in a very bleak time in Israel's history. The people are captive, separated from their homes, living in a strange land with religious customs much different from their own. The people are in despair, seeming to live without hope. It is in this dark hour that the Spirit of God comes to Ezekiel and sets before him this image of dry bones stretched out in the sun, and He asks Ezekiel, “Mortal, can these bones live?” Ezekiel acknowledges that God knows the answer to that question, and God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones the He will give breath to the bones, and they will be revived. Ezekiel obeys, and the bones are once more covered in sinew and flesh, but there is no breath. Then on God's command Ezekiel prophesies one more time saying, “Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they might live”, at which point, “the breath came into them, and they lived...”.

Obviously, the bones represent the people of Israel, who though not 'slain' physically, are surely dead in spirit. Their captivity has drained all sense of hope from them leaving them in a state of despair. But God has not given up on them and returns to them the breath of new life. As I have pointed out before, in both the Greek and Hebrew languages the word for breath is the same as the word for spirit – in fact, in biblical terms the two are inseparable. Both breath and God's Spirit give life, even in times when life seems impossible.

And so, let us do a little imaginative re-interpretation of this story, and see those scattered bones as representing each of us off in our worlds of isolation as the health crisis continues to grow and spread. We may not be at a state of despair and of total hopelessness, but certainly we all have our own degrees of anxiety and fear. There's no denying that this is a fearsome thing we are facing, but our faith as Christians should assure us that we are not facing it alone – that God knows our fears, our uncertainties, and even our boredom and loneliness as we remain separated from friends and family.

God may even feel saddened by the sight of so many empty church buildings at this very holy time of the year. Yet, at the same time God knows that the church at its core is not a place, but a living entity made of flesh and blood people with hearts and minds grounded in faith and bound by love. We may not be able to worship together at this time – well, not physically – but as we lift ourselves in prayer, we remain bound together in spirit.

Notice that in Ezekiel's vision the bones came back to life in stages. First, they were attached to sinew, and then flesh, and then covered with skin. It may very well be the case that our recovery from this crisis may come in stages, a little bit at a time, but with knowledge all along the way that the winds of God's life giving breath is sustaining us until we can once more celebrate as one!

Let us pray... Lord God of hope and mercy, these are difficult times, yet we know you are aware of our anxieties and fears, our pains and impatience, and that you have not abandoned us, but continue to bestow upon us your life giving breath. We grieve for those who have died and pray for those who are sick, as well as for all those who are care givers, for those who continue to supply us with all that is needed to survive. Give us wisdom, give us courage, faith, hope and love for the facing of these days. Amen.