

“Dry Bones”
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Sermon #101
5.23.21
Pentecost
63rd Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ezekiel 37:1-14 CEB

1 The Lord’s power overcame me, and while I was in the Lord’s spirit, he led me out and set me down in the middle of a certain valley. It was full of bones. **2** He led me through them all around, and I saw that there were a great many of them on the valley floor, and they were very dry.

3 He asked me, “Human one, can these bones live again?”

I said, “Lord God, only you know.”

4 He said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, Dry bones, hear the Lord’s word! **5** The Lord God proclaims to these bones: I am about to put breath in you, and you will live again. **6** I

will put sinews on you, place flesh on you, and cover you with skin. When I put breath in you, and you come to life, you will know that I am the Lord.”

7 I prophesied just as I was commanded. There was a great noise as I was prophesying, then a great quaking, and the bones came together, bone by bone. **8** When I looked, suddenly there were sinews on them. The flesh appeared, and then they were covered over with skin. But there was still no breath in them.

9 He said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, human one! Say to the breath, The Lord God proclaims: Come from the four winds, breath! Breathe into these dead bodies and let them live.”

10 I prophesied just as he commanded me. When the breath entered them, they came to life and stood on their feet, an extraordinarily large company.

11 He said to me, “Human one, these bones are the entire house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely finished.’ **12** So now, prophesy and say to them, The Lord God proclaims: I’m opening your graves! I will raise you up from your graves, my people, and I will bring you to Israel’s fertile land. **13** You will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and raise you up from your graves, my people. **14** I will put my breath in you, and you will live. I will plant you on your fertile land, and you will know that I am the Lord. I’ve spoken, and I will do it. This is what the Lord says.”

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Can these bones live again?

I imagine that question was asked by so many Jews in exile when they heard the words Ezekiel read. Remember, Babylon captured the Southern Kingdom of Judah and the first wave of exiles were taken around 597 BCE. Over the next ten or so years, more waves of exiles would be forced to Babylon. For plenty of people, the valley of dry bones represented their loved ones, homes, livelihoods, dreams, and national identity. The valley of dry bones

was not a place anyone would want to visit, but a place that brought overwhelming sorrow.

And why was the nation of Israel in shambles? Well, the kingdom split in two after King Solomon. The Northern Kingdom, Israel, and the Southern Kingdom, Judah, existed as two separate entities. In 723 BCE, Israel fell to the Assyrians. Nearly 200 years later, it happened to Judah.

For years and years and years, God sent the prophets to confront the rulers and peoples of the respective kingdoms. Elijah, Elisha, and Amos, for example, were sent to bring God's Word to the north. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel were prophets to the south. God was patient. God gave them every chance to destroy their idols, to

change their hearts and lives, to pursue Godly justice that makes sure those who lack do not lack. That is, the widows are taken care of, the orphans are housed, and those who hunger do not go hungry.

God's Word fell on deaf ears and the people refused to change.

Ezekiel's words are shocking, no doubt. There is so much imagery thrown around throughout the book. His words grab our attention, as today's verses have shown us. The people of Judah and, ultimately, all Jews in that time, felt the weight of despair and bitter defeat. After 32 chapters of judgment proclaimed on the people of Israel AND the entire world for their idolatry, chapters 33 through the end of Ezekiel are about renewal.

In chapter 37, Ezekiel is overcome with the LORD's spirit and he finds himself in a valley of dry bones. The bodies have long decomposed. There is nothing left to them other than old, cracked bones just laying in the forsaken ground. It doesn't seem to be anything worthwhile other than a place of sorrow where the hopes, dreams, and people of a once great nation have gone to rot and left forgotten.

Can these bones live again?

I imagine that is also a question for us. It's fascinating to think about the year that has passed since last Pentecost. May 31, 2020. Do you remember? It was our first indoor service in nearly

three months and 100,000 people had died from COVID in the U.S. In the months following leading up to today, we are just shy of 600,000. Loved ones. Those known only to God. People who were in the prime of their lives. Those who were the sole providers for their families. Those who hadn't reached adulthood. Those who had more years to contribute to society even though they were already old.

On top of the people who died in this country and across the world, the dreams, hopes, and security nets were shattered. Caregivers' lives were made harder. Parents and guardians trying to facilitate learning at home while trying to work. People on the frontlines who were celebrated as "heroes" and yet, still paid starvation wages and expected to risk their lives. People harassed for trying to protect

themselves as well as others. Business owners whose livelihoods disappeared.

We see a similar valley of dry bones and are asking ourselves: Can these bones live?

I read some fascinating statistics earlier this week regarding the health and well-being of children locally as well as nationally. Here in Jones County, did you know that before the pandemic, nearly 66% of children live in poor or low-income homes?¹ Just over 30% live in households that are food insecure? 6.4% are without health insurance? Or that per 1,000 children here in Jones County, 56 are assessed for abuse and neglect? And as a reminder, this is before

¹ <https://ncchild.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Jones.pdf>

COVID-19. The stats haven't been released, yet, to reflect the new normal. Potentially, these numbers may have gotten worse.

Something else that caught my attention. Nationally, did you know that due to the pandemic, there are approximately 43,000 children around the country who have lost a parent or caregiver over the last year due to COVID?² It's quite possible that it could tick up closer to 100,000 once the pandemic is under control. The parents, grandparents, friends, and other relatives who have died are no longer able to take care of these children. Children who were once engaged in activities are now withdrawing due to trauma. There is a need for counseling services and long-term support to deal with isolation. These children are looking at a valley of dry bones. They may be staring at the graves of their loved ones. They may be witnessing the destruction of their hopes and dreams. Possibly,

²<https://www.gpb.org/news/2021/04/05/study-estimates-43000-us-children-lost-parent-covid-19>

many may turn to substances or suicide because they may feel there is nothing left.

Can these bones live?

We have an opportunity. We have an opportunity in Jones County to make a difference. We do some of that already with the Childcare Center, Filling Station, and now as we are deepening our relationship with the elementary school. What we are doing is not to simply check off a few boxes. Food and education can mean the difference between life and death.

But, behind every box taken to feed a family, for every foster child who is ministered to by the Childcare Center, for every item

purchased to be used by the elementary school, there is a story. There is a story to why those children are in that situation and it's not always about someone's laziness. There are deeper problems that we must address in our community and, ultimately, our world, that contribute to children going without food, transportation to school, and healthcare. It's not a matter of simply opening up our wallets and donating some cash, though that's important. It's figuring out how to have conversations with the people who work directly with the children in our community to determine the root problems.

Can these bones live?

Yes, these bones can live because God is in the business of making a way when all seems hopeless. God is up to something, especially in the midst of loss. The Spirit is moving in our world and cannot be tamed and calls us to respond.

We may feel like our bones are dry, but the Spirit breathes life into us even when we think it's hopeless. God wasn't done with Ezekiel and the Jews and God isn't done with us. Our God is a life-giving God who has defeated the forces of evil and will continue to breathe life into us.

Siblings in Christ, trust this Good News!

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. Amen.