

“If Yesterday’s Bones Could Talk”

On the One Hundred Fiftieth Anniversary of Zion

Ezekiel 37:1-14

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Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

Ezekiel 37:1-14

¹The 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. ²He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, ‘Mortal, can these bones live?’ I answered, ‘O Lord God, you know.’ ⁴Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. ⁵Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I 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.’

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. ⁸I 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. ⁹Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.’ ¹⁰I 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.” ¹²Therefore prophesy, 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. ¹³And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I 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.’

Prayer.

It would be rather easy to allow this preaching moment to be focused on dry bones; death in the desert, the arid parched hot wind of Babylon. It would be easy to listen to the despair of exiled Jews, including the prophet Ezekiel, speak of how they longed to return to Jerusalem and the land of Abraham; to rebuild the smoldering, destroyed land of their homes. It would be easy to listen to Ezekiel tell of his vision in the Valley of Dry Bones, and to never allow our imagination to move beyond that bone dry, desert valley.

I suppose one could stretch the imagination with a different metaphor: Each Sunday when I come to West Walworth and park my car, I am left with two choices of where I will go, with whom I will worship, and for whom I will preach (if you're thinking Methodist or Baptist, you'd be wrong!). On one side of the road is the cemetery and on the other side is a gathering of disciples, the people known as Zion.

Most of us are rather fond of the cemetery across the street. Buried there are fathers, mothers, sons and daughters, friends and neighbors, soldiers and veterans, and even a few unknown. Our mowing mission over the past couple of months has certainly done more than just tend the graves. Hopefully, it has brought a sense of reverence and respect even to those of us for whom we have no relatives buried there.

But, let us be honest here, if you saw the parish pastor pull out the pulpit, drag it across the road, and begin to preach to the dry bones in the cemetery, you'd correctly believe that I was half off my rocker! (Get a video of that!)

The message of Ezekiel isn't rooted in the dry bones, in Babylonian exile, in a desert valley, in death, or even in cemetery across the street. The message of Ezekiel is in **what God can do with those bones.**

Instead, each week I choose to come across the street, through these front doors, to return home to Zion, and to work with these bones sitting in our pews, to keep these bones Spirit filled, to keep them Spirit fed, and to keep our bones Spirit driven; engaged in the work, mission and ministry of Jesus Christ in the world today.

As we look back over the body of Biblical evidence, and as we look back over the past 150 years of this parish, even the blind can see that God is in the business of rocking the bones of His people. Our God is not a God of death and despair. **Our God is a God of resurrection and life.**

New life is breathed into those bones in the valley. A daughter is raised, and so

is Lazarus. Jesus steps forth from the tomb and humankind is forever changed, given the gift of eternal life. "Where now, O death, is thy sting?" the apostle Paul rightly asked.

This is a story of resurrection and new life. It calls us to respect and honor the past, but not to idolize it. Like Ezekiel, we are called to respond to God's Word, if the bones of this parish are to live to see a new day. We labor in God's vineyard because this what faithful disciples of Jesus do. We reach out to the poor and disadvantaged, that God might grow new sinew upon these old bones. We tend to the sick, the widow, and the child, not for our sake, but for the sake of Christ's kingdom. **Jesus tells us to correct injustice, forgive beyond measure, live peacefully, and love all without condition.**

Even when we hang that new piece of siding, run that new circuit, and put up that new handicapped accessible restroom, we do it for the Paul Jr's of this world, the Christian Goddard's of this world, the Ryan's, Kyle's, Sami's, and Joe's of this world. When we gather food at our altar, sell nearly-new goods in our basement, and serve up turkey dinners each November at the fire house, we are doing it for the Kathleen's, Jason's, Jeffrey's, Emily's, Adam's, Sierra's, Bailey's, and Cherilynn's of our world. Just as the grandparents of our grandparents did it for us, so too, are we to labor on Christ's behalf for the grandchildren of our grandchildren.

When we obey the Word of the Lord, new life is breathed by the Spirit into old bones and muscles, and, after night has passed, a new tomorrow will dawn.

If those old bones across the street could talk to us today, I think that they would tell us that in death there may be decomposition, but there is also a new creation, won for us by the Lord of Life, Jesus Christ.

It never ceases to amaze me why some stubbornly choose death. We are given the choice: stay in the valley and allow your bones return to dust, or heed the word of the prophet and allow your bones to be resurrected. Dig your own grave, with no hope other than what a pine box or an urn can offer, or, cross the street and come into a living body that's laser focused on faithfully following, and finding new life in, Jesus Christ. We have a choice to live in the forever of yesterday, or to build God's kingdom today for a wondrous eternal tomorrow.

Dearly beloved saints of Zion, celebrate this day, this 150th anniversary of our parish. And when the sun sets this evening, let it go and let it be. It isn't about the history, the building, the pedigree of pastors, the money, or the programs – all that which is past and gone. It is all about God rocking our bones, bringing us

together breathing new life into each of us, that we might live faithfully for an even better dawn.

God has given us some pretty wonderful days, but **nothing compares to what God has in store for us tomorrow.**

This my beloved, is the Word of the Lord, as it has come to me. Thanks be to God. Amen.