

Ezekiel 37:1-14  
Can These Bones Live?  
WRCoB 12.5.21

You might find it strange that Ezekiel's vision  
"The Valley of Dry Bones"  
Is the Scripture Lesson  
For this Second Sunday in Advent.

At first reading it seems a stretch  
To make a connection between the two.

But there is a connection  
Between Israel's exile and captivity in Babylonia  
And Advent, the hope in the arrival of Jesus.

Each yearns for the coming of the Messiah.

The hymn that was sung last week  
Our first Sunday in Advent  
Specifically makes the connection.

1

*O Come, O Come, Immanuel  
and ransom captive Israel.  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.*

We sing it during the Christmas season  
In anticipation of the birth of Jesus

But the first verse uses the language and imagery  
Of Israel's captivity in Babylonia.

It is something Ezekiel  
The author of our Scripture Lesson  
Experienced firsthand.

He was among the first wave of refugees  
Forced to march from their beloved homeland  
To the foreign land of Babylonia.

Jeremiah and Isaiah are his contemporaries.

The Jewish nation is conquered, its people exiled.

They live in an alien environment  
And they despair because all hope is lost.

It is in this setting a vision comes to Ezekiel.

A vision, perhaps, stemming from PTSD  
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

For the way Ezekiel described the scene in such vivid detail  
Makes you wonder if in fact

Ezekiel witnessed the violence  
That befallen the people of Israel.

He may have passed battlefields  
On the way to Babylon  
Where the bones of Jewish warriors lay.

In those days, the victorious army would purposely  
Leave the dead of its enemy in the field of battle  
To be picked clean by the vultures

To the absolute horror of the nation.

It would have had a lasting effect on anyone.

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In his vision, the Spirit of God  
Takes Ezekiel on a tour around the valley.

The valley is filled with the bones of humans.

They have been there for a long time.

The Spirit asks Ezekiel  
**Mortal, can these bones live?**

And Ezekiel responds, "How can they?"  
**"O Lord God, you know."**

The Spirit then commands Ezekiel to preach to the bones.

Say to them, **Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.**

Ezekiel did.

And soon Ezekiel heard a rattling sound  
As the bones came together  
Bone to bone, sinew to sinew  
And flesh to flesh.

*Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones*  
*Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones*  
*Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones*  
*Now hear the word of the Lord.*

But even still, there was still no life in them.

~~

Then the Spirit tells Ezekiel to prophecy to the breath.

**2**  
Call upon this breath to **come from the four winds,**  
**O breath and breathe on these slain**  
**So that they live (v 9).**

And so, Ezekiel did.

And the breath, or wind, or spirit  
It being the same word in Hebrew  
Came into them.

And they rose up and stood before Ezekiel as a great army  
Filled with life from God's Holy Spirit.

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The people hearing Ezekiel's vision  
Would have understood the bones  
To be the nation of Israel in exile.

Its meaning brought them some consolation  
That God's Spirit would redeem the people.

And they would return to their homeland  
And begin anew.

There will be a resurrection of the nation of Israel.

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Today's lesson teaches that what appears dead  
Is not beyond God's capability to bring back to life.

I mean, THIS is the business of God.

To create something out of nothing  
To bring life out of death  
To plant the seeds of a new beginning!

To restore, redeem, revive, and resurrect!

The business of God is all about the business of life!

God's work never changes.

It's always about bringing life to a dying situation  
Literally and metaphorically!

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In our Scripture Lesson today  
The Spirit of God instructed Ezekiel to do two things.

Two things we can take away from this lesson.

In verse 4, God gives instruction to Ezekiel

3

**“Prophecy to these bones and say to them, O dry bones,  
hear the word of the LORD.”**

Interesting imagery, isn't it?  
Preaching to a bunch of dry bones?

It's sounds something like  
What happens at church on some Sundays!

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The first thing God instructed Ezekiel to do  
Was to preach the Word of God.

When the Word of God is preached  
Good things begin to happen.

There comes a sound, a rattling,  
Bone to bone, sinew, flesh and skin, come together.

When the Word of God is preached  
There is planted the seeds of new life.

In fact, it was the Word of God  
That brought all of creation into being!

God spoke and life happened.

And it is in the very Word of God made Flesh  
That came and dwelt among us.

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The second thing we can learn comes in verse 9  
When God instructs Ezekiel to call upon the Spirit.

4

**“Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath, Thus says the LORD God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.”**

When the breath of God, God’s Holy Spirit  
Is prayed for and sought after  
New life begins to appear among the dead.

God formed first man from the earth  
And breathed life into him.

And God breathed life into the tomb  
On that first Easter morning.

For in Christ’s resurrection, life proves victorious!

God’s Spirit breathes life into dead things.

God restores, redeems, revives and resurrects.

God’s work is about the work of creating life  
And his two agents are the Word and the Spirit.

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Down through the centuries God asks humanity  
**Mortal, can these bones live?**

And humanity answers, “How can they Lord?  
How can they possibly live?”

And God breathes upon it and new life appears.

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Israel, enslaved in Egypt for four hundred years  
Lived in despair and hopelessness.

And God asked them

**Mortals, can these bones live?**

And the people mourn and cry out in their oppression

**O Sovereign LORD, only YOU know!**

And God restores, redeems, revives and resurrects.

And the people of Israel are liberated to begin a new life.

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The nation of Judah, its city, Jerusalem, destroyed

The people scattered to the four winds

Lived without hope as exiles in foreign lands.

God asks them

**Mortals, can these bones live?**

And they answer, how can they Lord? How can they?

**Sovereign LORD, only YOU know.**

And God brings Restoration and Redemption

Revival and Resurrection.

The exiles are liberated and return to their homeland

To begin a new life.

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And as Mary, and Mary the mother of Jesus

And Peter, and John and the others

Gathered on that first Easter morning

After watching Jesus die on the cross

God asks, **Mortals, can these bones live?**

And they answer, how can they Lord. How can they?

Jesus, our Savior was crucified, dead, and buried.

**O Sovereign LORD, only YOU know.**

And Jesus rises from the grave to meet them.

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And when we gather around the graves of our loved ones  
In the cemeteries of the dead  
Hopeless and in despair

God asks us

**O sons and daughters,  
Can these bones live?**

And from the very deepest recesses of our souls we reply  
**O Sovereign LORD, only you know!**

And we leave our very beloved in God's eternal care.

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And here, as we sit in the pews of this church.

As we consider our own mortality.

As we reflect on life, and death  
And what lies beyond the grave

God asks each and every one of us  
**Mortals, can these bones live?**

Can these tired, old bones of mine live on?

When my life on earth is done  
Will these old bones carry me any further?

**O Sovereign LORD, YOU know!**

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And we cling to what Jesus said.

**5**

**John 11:25 I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live. <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.**

We place our hope in a God whose business is life  
Who works relentlessly  
Restore, redeeming, reviving and resurrecting.

Our souls are at peace when we build a firm foundation  
Based upon the Word of God  
And anointed by the Holy Spirit.

These old bones of ours might just live on  
Today, tomorrow, and forever,  
Through Christ, our Lord, our life-giver.

6  
*Breathe on me breath of God  
Fill me with life anew  
That I may love what thou dost love  
And do what thou wouldst do.*

7  
*Breathe on me breath of God  
So shall I never die  
But live with thee the perfect life  
Of thine eternity.*

Come, Lord Jesus, come  
And bring us life  
Here and now and here after.

Amen.