

Ezekiel 37:1-14
Breathing in New Life
3.26.23

I was inspired this week by a sermon from Brian Walsh

He is from a group known as Empire Remixed
A Baptist-Church-Turned-Nightclub.

Part of my sermon includes thoughts and quotes from him.

The Book of Ezekiel is definitely a weird kind of book.

For Ezekiel was a strange kind of guy.

Get this, he once ate a Bible (Ch. 3)
To prove that the Word of God
Was as sweet as honey.

I doubt his digestive track agreed.

He was a man of many visions.

It seems the vision before us today
With its vivid description

Was something Ezekiel might have personally experienced.

It's feasible he witnessed just such a scene
On the long and despairing march into exile.

Whereas the prophet Jeremiah was able to stay behind
After the Babylonian conquest of Judah

King Nebuchadnezzar forced a great mass of Judeans
Including Ezekiel to leave their homeland
To live as refugees in Babylon.

Whose bones are these?

Are they the bones of Jewish soldiers who died in battle?

Back in Ezekiel's era, victorious armies
Purposely left the dead of its enemy
In the field of battle

To the absolute horror of the defeated army's families.

Whose bones? Might they be the bones
Of 1st Century Christians martyred for their faith?

Are these bones theirs?

Or are they the bones of the millions of Jews
Exterminated in the Nazi holocaust?

Might they the bones that lay
In the killing fields of Cambodia?

Could they be the bones of the Tutsis
Killed by the Hutu rivals
In the Rwanda genocide?

Or are they the victims of Boko Haram, ISIS, or El Qaida?

Surely, they are the bones killed by death squads
In Mexico, Central or South America?

Or the bones of the Russians soldiers
Forced to fight a war they want nothing to do with?

They have to be the bones
Of the Ukrainians forced to defend themselves
Against the invading neighbor/enemy?

Rachel, the Matriarch of the Bible
Knew whose bones they are.

Matthew 2:18 Her voice is heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; who refuses to be consoled because they are no more.

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African American preachers knew whose bones they were.

They sang about these bones.

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

These were the bones of their people.

And the song they sang was a song of resurrection.

They knew why these bones were disconnected.

*. . . a beating from your master or a lynching from the KKK
resulted in neck bones disconnected from the head bone or
the shoulder bones being disconnected from the back bone*

To sing the foot bone is connected to the ankle bone
The ankle bones connected to the leg bone
Is really a song of defiant liberation.

These bones are gonna rise up and walk around

These Black preachers knew whose bones they were.

They were the bones of their mothers and fathers
Their sisters and brothers
Their aunties and uncles

Folks whose bones were broken
Under the violent oppression of slavery.

These are the bones of the oppressed and marginalized
The downtrodden and rejected people.

These bones are “dem bones”

If it wasn't for the rather lighthearted way
James Weldon Johnson composed, Dem Bones

The vision itself would be a scene of horror and brutality.

It could be a scene from Auschwitz
Or Rwanda
Or Bakhmut.

In Ezekiel's vision
God asks a question.

It seems a rather absurd question.

Mortal, can these bones live?

God, what kind of question is that?

Ezekiel replies, **Lord, only you know that!**

Preach to these bones, says the Lord
Preach to these bones the Word of God.

Now here's a congregation that needs a little life.

So old Ezekiel who literally ate the Words of God
Is now literally preaching to a bunch of bones!

When God tells you to jump
You don't ask why, you ask, how high?

And there comes a noise in that valley of dry bones
A rattling sound, a clattering
As the bones came together

Bone to bone
Sinew to sinew
Muscle to muscle.
Flesh to flesh

Until all the bones were connected back where they belong.

But there was no life in them.

And God said, **Prophecy, oh Mortal**
And say to the breath.

**Come from the four winds, O breath
And breathe upon these slain that they may live.**

And the prophet did as he was told
And the four winds came
And breathed life into those lifeless bodies.

And there they stood, a vast multitude of people
Resurrected and restored.

*If they are to be resurrected
If this community is to enter history anew,
If those who have been exiled and cut off*

*If those who have been violently abused and discounted
Are to experience [any kind of] resurrection.*

*If they are to have new life blown into them
If their graves are to be opened
And death be overthrown*

If they are to be placed back on their feet

*All [their] bone, sinews, relationships and life
Reconnected and restored*

*Then they need a place to stand
A place to till
A place to love.*

Ezekiel 37: 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.

And those early black preachers preached

If these bones are going to live

They gonna need a place to live and call their own

They need a place within society

That honors and respects them

That works side-by side with them

*There can be no resurrection of 'dem bones' without
emancipation of those bodies, without setting free of those
bodies into a life of racial, political, and economic justice.*

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But listen, in a restored society

All groups within that society need new life.

One group can't change until all groups change.

All the subgroups that make up a society

Need the anointing of the Spirit

That they might come to know

And understand and empathize

Each other's' struggles and history

To strive for justice for all subgroups within society.

Because dem bones are all of our bones.

All groups need resurrection

From whatever deaths they have died from.

To restore and resurrect one subgroup
Within a larger society

Means to restore all the subgroups
That make up that society.

The kingdom of God will leave no one behind

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And so, what is true
For the descendants of African slaves

What is true for the survivors and descendants
Of the holocaust

And for other valleys of dry bones

What is true of any oppressed and persecuted people

Is just this.

Our God is a God of life

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 mourned and cried out in their oppression
O Sovereign LORD, only YOU know!

And God Restores, Redeems, Revives and Resurrects.

The nation of Judah, its city, Jerusalem, destroyed
The people scattered to the four winds
Lived without hope as exiles in foreign lands.

God asked them

Mortals, can these bones live?

And they answer, how can they Lord?

How can they?

Sovereign LORD, only YOU know.

And God Restores, Redeems, Revives and Resurrects.

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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 seeing Jesus die on the cross

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

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

Jesus, our Savior 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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Brothers and sisters, let us place our hope
in a God whose business is life.

Who works unceasingly
Restoring, redeeming, reviving and resurrecting.

Let Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones
Be our vision for peace and justice

For every subgroup

 Within our multiracial/multicultural society

We know God is a life-saver and life-giver

 Because we find these sweet words in the Bible

I don't need Ezekiel to eat a Bible

 To prove to me the Word of God

 Is as sweet as honey.

Amen?

 Amen!