

Sermon for March 12, 2017
“Can These Bones Live!?”

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Israel was dead and Ezekiel had seen it! He had seen the temple destroyed and the city burned. He had watched as the army was decimated and overrun by enemy forces. He had seen the king humiliated and put in chains. And he had been carried off into captivity himself. And now by the rivers of Babylon their captors tormented them saying, “Sing us one of those songs of Zion.” How could they sing of Jerusalem when they had seen it destroyed? So they hung up their lyres by the willows of Babylon and swore they would never sing of the Promised Land again.

Sure Ezekiel had seen it all. But he had seen more. Had seen a vision of wheels within wheels. He knew that God’s plans were intricate and wondrous, beyond the pall of human comprehension. But how could Israel live again?

The conclusion was apparent. Israel was dead. Like the corpses on the battle field that never get buried. They are picked clean by the vultures and decompose in the sun. There was nothing left of Israel, but dry bones.

One day, by the river in Babylon, Ezekiel tried to pray. All he could think of was the deadness of Israel and hopelessness of their situation. Then the spirit of God got hold of Ezekiel. It picked him up and plopped him down in a valley of bones just like the ones he imagined back in Israel. Maybe this was God saying “Yes, Ezekiel, Israel is dead. As dead as these bones.”

Then God said, “Ezekiel, can these bones live?” The obvious answer was “No.” Everyone could tell they had been picked clean by the buzzards then left to be bleached by the sun. Ezekiel knew that God could do amazing things but he dared not dream that Israel could live, so he could not actually say “Yes, they can live.” So he said, “Lord you know.”

Then God said, “Ezekiel, preach to the bones. Preach to them that they can live. Tell them to hear this word from the Lord that I will bring them back together and breathe life into them and they shall live again!” So Ezekiel preached and there was a rattling. Small at first but it grew and the rattling became so loud that the earth shook. And the “Toe bone connected to the foot bone, Foot bone connected to the heel bone, Heel bone connected to the ankle bone, Hear the word of the Lord!” And sinews and muscles and skin covered the bones.

But they were like dead bodies, cadavers, lifeless. So God said, “Preach to the wind. Tell the wind to spirit breath into these bodies.” So Ezekiel preached to the wind, and it breathed spirit into the bodies they stood; a vast multitude. And God said, “This is Israel. They are dead, but I will give them life.”

Can you imagine how Ezekiel felt? Perhaps you can. It may not have been a literal valley of dry bones, but we have all stood in that place. Perhaps it was the charred remains of a cherished house of worship. Perhaps it was in a funeral home surrounded by family and friends. Maybe it was in a doctor’s office with a dire diagnosis. Maybe it was in court as divorce papers are being signed.

No matter where it was, something or someone cherished and important had died. And your life felt like a valley of dried bones picked clean by the buzzards. Can these bones live? How could you dare to hope to find joy again? What should you do in that situation? Preach! Preach to those dry bones and say "Thus says the Lord. You will live." Proclaim the hope of the Lord in the midst of your despair. Trust in the new life giving power of the God who sustained Israel. Preach new life and there will be a rattling; I said, "There will be a rattling" and your life will be shook up. "Ankle bone connected to the shin bone, Shin bone connected to the knee bone, Knee bone connected to the thigh bone, Hear the Word of the Lord."

Then preach to the wind. Call on the wind to give breath to the corpse of your heart and life. Preach in faith to the wind and the Spirit will enter you. And by the power of the Holy Spirit of God you will be raised up.

Maybe you don't know what I am talking about. But I've been in some churches that were valleys of dry bones. It may not have been the Spirit of God, but the Bishop had picked me up and plopped me in the middle of valley of dry bones. I have been in some churches where all they talked about was how good things used to be. Back in the day when there were more children and youth than adults. Back in the day when people went to church on Sundays; every Sunday. Back when people listened to the church instead of just ignoring it.

And I wondered, "Can these bones live?" But God said, "Alex, Preach to the bones." I said "But they're dead. How can they hear?" God said, "Preach to them anyway." "What should I preach?" "Preach that they will live."

So I preached new life in Christ. I preached hope and faith and love. And there was a rattling. I said then there was a rattling! "Thigh bone connected to the hip bone, Hip bone connected to the back bone, Back bone connected to the shoulder bone, Now hear the word of the Lord."

And I preached to the wind, and the Holy Spirit came upon them. They ceased to be dead and they were alive. And they had hope and showed love and grace. Instead of looking at the past and mourning the things that were lost, they looked forward to the future. And they rose up; a congregation serving God.

Church, we live in a world where people are standing in valleys of dry bones. They feel dead and hopeless. They are lost in drugs or materialism or poverty or depression. They look around and they say "Can these bones live?"

What should we do? Preach to the bones! Preach that God can give new life. Preach hope and reconciliation. And don't be surprised when you hear a rattling. "Shoulder bone connected to the neck bone, Neck bone connected to the head bone. Ezekiel connected dem dry bones. Now hear the word of the Lord."

Then preach to the wind. Pray for the Holy Spirit to breath on them. And watch as they - as we - come back to life!