

Living Out of Death and Despair

Fifth Sunday in Lent (Ezekiel 37:1–14; John 11:1–45)

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Grace and peace to you

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

As we move deeper into the season of Lent... we find ourselves... not yet at Easter...
but standing... in between. Between promise... and fulfillment. Between grief... and hope.
Between death... and life.

And today... Scripture places us in two powerful scenes: A valley... full of dry bones.
And a tomb... sealed by death.

Ezekiel: The Valley of Dry Bones

The prophet Ezekiel is taken by the Spirit... into a valley. Not a peaceful valley...
but a valley filled with bones. And not just bones... Dry bones. Very dry bones.

Which means... This is not a recent death. This is death... that has settled in. Hope... that has
long been gone. And God asks a question that seems almost impossible. “Mortal... can these
bones live?” Ezekiel does not argue. He does not speculate. He simply says:

“O Lord God... you know.” A response of humility... and trust.

Context and Theological Insight

The people of Israel... at this time... were in exile. Their land was gone. Their temple was
destroyed. Their identity was shattered. They described themselves in these words:

“Our bones are dried up... And our hope is lost.” And yet... into that hopelessness... God speaks.

Ezekiel's intent was to prophesy the eventual return to the land of Israel of the descendants of those Jews who had been marched against their will to Babylon. The dry bones represent the dusty sense of hopelessness that the exiles would ever find their way home. "These bones are the whole house of Israel," Ezekiel is told in verse 11, and they will, one day, return to the land of Israel.

Ezekiel grounded this political hope in a more fundamental hope for the resurrection of the dead, which is the source of all hope. For a body to be resuscitated long after it has begun to decompose, that is a miracle possible only to God. Therefore, it is not merely a political promise of return... It is something deeper. It is a vision of resurrection. Not superficial repair... not partial healing...—but total restoration.

The Process of Restoration

In Ezekiel's vision... the bones don't come to life all at once. First... there is movement. Bone to bone. Then sinews... then flesh... And still... no life. Until... the breath comes. This breath... in Hebrew, *ruach*... means Spirit... wind... life itself.

It is God's breath... That makes the difference. That is the Spirit of God. And suddenly... what was dead... stands alive. This is not just about Israel returning from exile. It is about something deeper. God does not just improve life. God restores life. God resurrects.

Personal Testimony: Encountering Death

My dear friends... This is not just a story for me. It is something I have lived through.

In my own life... I have witnessed seven deaths... within my family... under one roof... over thirty years.

Grandparents...

parents...

my sister...

my father's aunt...

his sister...And finally... my mother. Her death...was the most difficult. It left me in a place...where I could not move forward... for years. A kind of inner dryness... a kind of emotional emptiness. And yet... life continued. The stomach still wanted food. Children still wanted to play. People returned to work. Everything... became normal again.

The Question of Healing

And I kept asking myself: How is this possible? How does the human mind... accept such loss? Is it time... that heals us? I do not think so. I believe... it is something deeper. The quiet... persistent... breath of God. Working within us...even when we are not aware of it.

The Dark Night of the Soul

Many of us have experienced what is often called...the "dark night of the soul." It points to periods of time when doubt, hopelessness, depression, fear, and anxiety were prominent in our daily lives. Certainly, hopelessness and despair were communal experiences for the people of Israel at the time of Ezekiel's vision of dry bones. What could we possibly learn from these "dry" periods of life when we feel as disconnected and brittle as the bones in Ezekiel's vision? These dry seasons are not meaningless.

Spiritual Reflection

Perhaps the question for us this Lent is this: What can our dry bones teach us? What do these seasons reveal...about our faith? About our dependence on God? About the depth of our spiritual life? If we were to examine our spiritual bones...

What would we find? What can we learn about ourselves and our relationship with the world from the painful, difficult paths we are called to walk?

What would we find out about our spiritual maturity if we examined our spiritual bones? Are we nourished by prayer? By Scripture? By reflection? Do we truly long... for the fruits of the Spirit?

Love... joy... peace... patience...

kindness... goodness... faithfulness...

gentleness... self-control?

Ezekiel's vision is given for a people who have lost heart, who are suffering a death of the spirit, a living death in exile in a foreign land. Ezekiel witnesses the soul of his people gradually wither and die, maimed and put into a valley of dry bones. Can these bones live?

Can we honestly give the humble response of Ezekiel, "O Lord God, you know," to God's gracious offer of love and mercy? Who is God telling to preach to our bones? How do we open ourselves up to that living breath of the Spirit? God is willing to breathe into us and fill us once more with the transformation that allows us to be a part of the kingdom of God. Can we envision our spiritual bones with new flesh and blood?

The Role of the Word and Spirit

In Ezekiel's vision...The bones cannot raise themselves. They need a word. They need breath.

God commands Ezekiel... to prophesy. To speak... into lifelessness. And when the Word is spoken...and the Spirit breathes...Life begins.

John 11: From Valley to Tomb

And this same movement...From death... to life...Continues in the Gospel of John. We stand now... not in a valley...—but before a tomb. The tomb of Lazarus.

Jesus and Human Grief

Martha says: “Lord... if you had been here...”

Do you hear that? That quiet disappointment... that hidden pain...“If only...”

We have all said that. “If only things had been different...” “If only I had done something...” “If only God had acted sooner...” Those words carry...Disappointment. Grief. Unanswered questions. “If only...”

Jesus Weeps

And then...Jesus weeps. Not because he lacks power...But because he shares our pain.

This is the heart of God. A God who does not stand at a distance...But enters into our sorrow.

The Call to Life

And then... Jesus speaks: “Lazarus... come out!” And the impossible happens. The dead man walks out. Still bound...—but alive.

Christological Fulfillment

This moment points us forward. To another tomb. To another death. To another question:

Can the bones of a crucified man live? And the answer...is yes.

Toward Easter

Because the same breath...That moved over the dry bones...That raised Lazarus...Raised Jesus Christ. And that same Spirit...Has been given to us.

Conclusion: Living the Question

So today...Hear the question of God: "Mortal... can these bones live?"

And perhaps... like Ezekiel... We do not know how. We do not know when. But we know who.

"O Lord God... you know."

Final Affirmation

And so... even in the valley...even before the tomb... We dare to say: Yes, Lord. Yes... These bones can live. Most definitely... yes.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.