

Psalm 130

Romans 8:6-11

John 11:1-45

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Spirit of True Life

The 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 around 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, "Prophesy 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." 7So 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, "Prophesy 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. 11Then 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.

The other day when I was visiting with our friends the Finks, the Father of the family shared with me a sermon illustration from one sermon they had heard years ago in worship. The Rabbi asked, "If you knew that the world was going to be flooded and you only had very little time left to live, what would you do?" What would YOU do?

Well, I answered that I would do everything possible to make my last moments of life peaceful and full of love, there is nothing worse in my imagination than to allow my last moments to be full of terror.

Well, it seems the Rabbi had answered, "We would learn how to breathe under water."

Ooooo - very interesting, I replied, then I thought about it and said, "but we have the whole resurrection with Christ thing going for us, to wit the father replied, yeah, we don't have that." And it struck me for the first time one of the fundamental difference in our faiths, for which I feel thankful, because I don't know if I could learn how to breathe under water!

However - the thought process is intriguing. This reply implies a power to survive and adapt - a mentality that God's people can overcome any adversity. And the Jewish followers have survived a great deal!

And that is what this scripture is all about. This is Ezekiel's vision about the Jews return to Israel after they had been marched out to Babylon against their will. Kelton Cobb wrote, "The dry bones represent the dusty sense of hopelessness that the exiles would ever find their way home . . . At the core of biblical narrative is the story of displacement - of having wandered a long way from home, and longing to return. This is the underlying plot of being cast out of Eden, of being foreigners in Egypt, of the journey to the Promised Land, of the longing of exiles in Babylon to return to the land of their fathers."

We hear this theme also in Jesus, but he seems to have come to terms with the exile. No wonder - he seems to be quite adjusted to traveling. His early years seemed to be one of constant moving. He was born on the journey and fled to avoid being killed. Then he travelled around recruiting people saying, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Jesus was the manifestation of the presence of God – our Gospel tells of how he brought Lazarus back to life – his body was barely cold, and his bones far from being dry – but the message is the same – God brings hope back to life – and life back to life.

We have all experienced “dry bones times” in our spiritual lives and the hope of this passage of scripture has held for over 2,600 years! It is the resurrection of a hope that appears to be lost. The African American slaves sang the famous song, “DESE BONES GWINE RISE AGAIN” which I always thought made reference to Ezekiel’s vision – but in further study it is about the exile from the Garden of Eden. Again, a peoples who have been separated – living in exile – from the country where they had once belonged, calling to God in faith that as the bones rise again they will one day find rest in a homeland where they are no longer outsiders – being somewhere where they know they belong.

My personal take on these scriptures is one of a bit of trepidation. For I feel that God is calling me to be God’s mouthpiece – and I pray that my life will also be one of hearing and prophesying what God wants here at Hyattstown.

We came here almost 2 years ago now, as exiles, and you cared for us. For me it has been a bit difficult – starting out being diagnosed with Spondylosis of the cervical spine, then clinical depression, and various other health issues. And you have cared for me so beautifully. I feel as though I am home now. As though I belong. I am not longer an exile. Each day I feel stronger and clear and more enthused to do God’s will here.

This congregation is like Lazarus – we aren’t dry bones yet – we are barely cold! IN fact we are thriving at loving and caring for each other and for outward mission. Not that we can ever grow too comfortable and that we have no areas of improvement. But we are still a good foundation of parts of the body of Christ. We have grown a bit small and we struggle to believe that we could grow.

So I will dare to prophesy in the name of God today. I do believe our congregation will rise again – we will be transformed. “At the 2001 General Assembly, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) adopted the 2020 Vision, which contained four priorities that will guide the Church through the first two decades of the 21st century: becoming a Pro-reconciling/Anti-racist church; formation of 1,000 new congregations by 2020; transformation of 1,000 current congregations by 2020; and leadership development necessary to realize these new and renewed congregations.

Sometime after Easter we will be forming a committee to explore this program and determine if and or how we can or will use it in our growth.

From the information about the program online I got this:

Transformation is the intentional spiritual journey that a Congregation undertakes systemically in order to realize what God has called it to be as church and to do in mission in today’s world.

- ▶ This journey is spiritual because transformation is the work of God. It is about listening to God, deepening our relationship with God, and acting upon what we discern is God’s will.
- ▶ It is systemic because it is about everything a congregation is and does, not just one aspect of its program. It is connected denominationally and to the whole church.
- ▶ This is a strategic journey because it addresses change in an intentional process of action steps.
- ▶ Since communities of faith are an integral part of the entire web of God’s ecology, the transformation of congregations is a piece of God’s transformation of all creation, addressing the pressing needs for stewardship of the world.
- ▶ Transformation is a continuous process. One cannot point to a finally transformed congregation, but we can all be on the way. The journey is our home.

The dry bones come back to life and find their way back home, Jesus bring Lazarus back to life, and in our Epistle we heard, “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

We are on a journey with Christ where we have no home – but God. True life is living with the Spirit of God and trusting in that.

Well, - are you ready for the adventure? Are you ready to learn how to follow the Spirit of true life and figure out how we can breathe under water? Well, I am!