



Ezekiel 37:1-14

The Valley of Dry Bones

Old Testament Reading
Sunday 29th March 2020

This is perhaps the most familiar passage in Ezekiel. I am told there are over 80,000 references to this story on Google.

The opening is dramatic, "The Lord's hand was upon me . . ." The prophet Ezekiel is given a vision as he is transported to a desert plain, a dry, barren place, where he is set down among numerous dried out human bones spread out as far as the eye can see.

Not only is the prophet to behold them, and see their dryness and hopelessness, but he has to pass through them to get a true experience of their futile state. It is not a pretty picture, nor is it a pleasant experience, even for us the reader.

Ezekiel is then asked a question, "Can these bones live?" Ezekiel, by now, has become more and more familiar with God's ways, and knows that "No" is not the right answer. He simply says that God knows the answer.

Then Ezekiel is given an odd command, "Prophecy to them!" You wonder what can be achieved by this. It sounds daft.

But the prophet obeys, and the miracle begins as bit by bit the bones become bodies again. Then comes the most important bit, as if what has already happened isn't impressive enough, as God says they need breath to make them truly alive. The wind brings that breath – breath which is the Spirit – and they become fully alive.

It is important to see that the emphasis is not primarily about individuals being restored, but also communal life being revived. Reiterating a favourite theme of Ezekiel, the people will know who God is.

Today we are experiencing life being disrupted, our familiar daily patterns have disappeared as we adapt to the daily changes required of us. For the time being life cannot continue as usual. Somewhat like the people of Israel, our world has been changed, and in many places, torn-apart.

Where do we find our breath amid the chaos?

Is faith, or indeed renewed faith, possible?

Can communities be rebuilt?

I love Ezekiel's answer. He is very honest, as he says, "I don't know, but God, I believe you know."

When life has lost its predictability, and things seem chaotic; when faith has lost its imagination, sustaining a vision of the future can be very challenging.

God says, "Speak to the bones, Ezekiel. Tell them what I will do."

Ezekiel is to speak to a people who have lost heart, who are suffering and confused about the future. He has witnessed the soul of the community withering away.

In these words, they, and we, are assured that our future still holds something good, even if we do not know what it is. We are assured that God knows.

Like Ezekiel, we are encouraged to realise that the present is the only time when faith can take action. We realise that the breath/wind/spirit plays a central role. When truth and hope are brought together, the community in all its various parts begins to knit together. We, those who realise 'God knows', become instrumental in envisioning God's future for God's world.

There is spiritual entitled: 'Dese Bones Gwine Rise Again.' It contains the refrain:

'I know it, deed I know it, dese bones gwine rise again.'



Prayer - Psalm 130

The Message

The psalm for this week picks up some of the themes shown in the Ezekiel passage. There is honesty in the psalmist's plea as one aware that only God can turn his life around. He confesses his humanity and trusts in the power of God for restoration for him and the community.

¹⁻² Help, GOD—the bottom has fallen out of my life!

Master, hear my cry for help!

Listen hard! Open your ears!

Listen to my cries for mercy.

³⁻⁴ If you, GOD, kept records on wrongdoings,
who would stand a chance?

As it turns out, forgiveness is your habit,
and that's why you're worshiped.

⁵⁻⁶ I pray to GOD—my life a prayer—
and wait for what he'll say and do.

My life's on the line before God, my Lord,
waiting and watching till morning,
waiting and watching till morning.

⁷⁻⁸ O Israel, wait and watch for GOD—
with GOD's arrival comes love,
with GOD's arrival comes generous redemption.

No doubt about it—he'll redeem Israel,
buy back Israel from captivity to sin.