

Ezekiel 37:1-14

37The 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, “Prophecy 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, “Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, 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 prophecy, 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.

“From Death to Life”

Months ago when I started working on my Worship Planning, I thought that this text was exciting and unusual. Now, when I am re-reading it, in the middle of a virus epidemic, it sounds terrifying and powerful. The image we find here is chillingly timely. Ezekiel, the Prophet, sees a whole valley full of bones. Death everywhere. No hope in this valley, except one thing: the Prophet is not alone.

God shows Ezekiel a horrifying vision, but God is in control of the experience. The Prophet is silent. No wonder. He can't find words for the horror. Later today, when we hear the news on our TV's or computers, we may also become speechless. The scenes that are playing on our screens and monitors are scary, like they were cut out of a horror movie.

Nurses and doctors in futuristic clothes and masks, scramble to care for people, while huge refrigerated Mack Trucks drive the infected bodies to the morgue. It's scary. The only consolation we have as Christians is that we know: God is in control.

If we look at the historical background of our Ezekiel text, the scary images may make more sense. In the 6th century B.C.E. a Jewish tragedy took place. Many people were killed; not by a virus, but by war. Jerusalem, the capital city was destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar. The remaining Jewish leaders were taken into exile. Together with these leaders, the prophet Ezekiel was also taken as a slave to Babylon in 597 B.C.E. The situation seemed hopeless. It looked like Israel and Judah were lost forever. ...

Ezekiel's vision about the dried out bones is scary, especially these days, when death lurks right outside our homes. His silence is our silence when we are shocked by the rising numbers of the dead. The prophet feels powerless, and that's how we have been feeling during the last few weeks. The prophet can't find words to even ask God or blame God for anything. While Ezekiel is silent, God speaks. God asks Ezekiel: "Mortal, can these bones live?"

What would you answer to this question? I know my answer: "No way! It's impossible. Dried out bones can never come to life..." But the Prophet Ezekiel is wiser. He has vision to see beyond the zombie apocalypse. Ezekiel knows who he is speaking to and he is very careful with the words he chooses. He says: "O Lord God, you know."

Ezekiel doesn't simply look at the outside circumstances; he believes that God can do anything. God is in control. Ultimately, God has power over life and death.

After God command him, Ezekiel does his job as a prophet, and prophesies to the bones. Guess what happens next? Oh, you know: the horror movie continues. The dead come alive in front of our eyes. The bones come together with rattling and quaking, as sinew, flesh, and skin form on them. Zombies appear. The bodies are ready, but they have no soul. They are waiting for something to bring them alive.

Ezekiel has to prophesy again, and this time he acts like a Necromancer. Ezekiel becomes God's shaman, and prophesies to the four winds of the earth. The word we encounter in the text is "ruach", which means "breath", "wind", and "spirit" simultaneously.

Ezekiel prophesies to the four corners of the earth and the Spirit of God enters the bodies. Now a multitude of living people stand in the valley. Finally, the horror movie is over. Ezekiel's vision changes from a nightmare on Elm Street, into a dream of resurrection.¹

I love that this text comes weeks before Easter. I don't know how and where we will be celebrating Easter, but I know one thing: resurrection is unstoppable. Our God is a powerful God. Life will come out of death, no matter what the world says. Death doesn't have the last word. Not even the Coronavirus scares God. The God who brought Jesus back from the dead, will give all of us life eternal. So you do not have to be afraid. Life is more powerful than death. God is more powerful than a virus.

From our Bible text we also learn the meaning of Ezekiel's vision. The people in the Babylonian exile felt spiritually dead and cut off from God. However, God was as near to them as their own breath. God was with them, even when they didn't feel God's presence. Their situation may have been difficult, but their future was full of promise.²

1 <http://www.patheos.com/Progressive-Christian/Becoming-Whole-Again-John-Holbert-03-31-2014?offset=1&max=1>; Becoming Whole Again: Reflections on Ezekiel 37:1-14 by John C. Holbert.

2 http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2070; Commentary on Ezekiel 37:1-14 by Margaret Odell,

Sometimes, we feel dead on the inside. Sometimes, we lose hope. When we are suffering, lose a loved one, a relationship, or a job, we feel like the life is sucked out of us.

Some people turn to drugs, alcohol, and other addictions. Let's not judge them. Life can be difficult, especially without faith. The stress and isolation caused by the outbreak can bring us down, and make us negative.

But don't give up. There is hope. In Ezekiel the message is clear: God has the power to change everything. God can bring us from death to life. Even when we feel dead on the inside, when we can't find hope, God brings help into our lives. God brings new life to our dried out bones.

The Bible can be scary sometimes, but life is even scarier. Listening to news about the Coronavirus can fill us with fear. Sometimes, we just feel vulnerable and powerless. In those times we must remember that God is in control. God breathed life into our bodies, and God is ready to transform us, and our world. When we pray, God hears our voice. When we need resurrection, God's Spirit comes to our help.³

Ezekiel's vision proves that death has no power over us. Under all of life's conditions, we are able to live full, joy filled lives. Just like the death of winter is being replaced by flowering trees and buzzing bees, our souls can also be inspired and our bones refreshed. ...

What are the dead places in your life? Are you afraid of dying from the virus? Do you have trouble praying? Do you feel out of control?

If you are struggling, don't worry. God is in control. God brings life out of death, and resurrection out of a zombie-like existence. If you feel out of control; surrender. Turn to God with all your body, mind, and spirit.

Ask God for that life-giving breath, we call the Holy Spirit. Pray to the "Ruach", the God of the four corners of the earth, for strength, hope, joy, and peace. Pray for others. Remember, that even though you cannot come to church, the church comes to you.

3 <http://www.patheos.com/Progressive-Christian/We-Rattling-Bones-John-C-Holbert-05-15-2015;>

We are one in Christ, and we meet in the Spirit. There are many things you can do for your soul in the meantime. You can watch spiritual videos, listen to worship services, read sermons, and sing hymns. All these life-giving gifts come from God, who created, sustains, and transforms our lives.

Where are the dead places in your life? With what do you need God's help? How can God take away your fears and lead you, from death to life? **Amen.**

Pastoral Prayer

Lead us from death to life, wonderful God. Heal our sick world, on every level. Transform us into your messengers of strength, hope, joy, and peace. Guide our feet, that even during Coronavirus outbreak, we may walk in your ways, and do your will.

Bless us that we may become blessings in the lives of our families, and friends. Help us to pray more, and be in your presence, as we take more time alone, and distance ourselves socially. Be our friend, while we cannot be with our friends. Inspire us to be fully alive in the Spirit, under any and all conditions.

Wash over our dry souls and bring us to new life. Quench our spiritual thirst and empower us to spread your good news to all people. Thank you for loving and accepting us as we are, and help us to love others the same way.

Now, we pray for all people that are suffering in body, mind, or spirit from this terrible disease. Be with those in the hospitals and nursing homes. Heal your people. Comfort the lonely and the grieving.

We also pray for those on the front lines in the fight against this deadly epidemic. Be with everyone who has to work in danger. Inspire our scientists and leaders to find a solution that will help our whole world.

In this time of doubt, we place all our trust in you. We trust you now as we have in the past. Life-giving Spirit, lead us from death to life, from hopelessness to hope. Inspire us to be your joyful followers who spread the good news of your love.

We pray all this in Jesus' name who taught us to say:

Our Father...