

Sermon for Sunday, Nov. 30, 2025
The first Sunday of Advent

Ezekiel 37:1-14

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Today we continue our consideration of prophecies from the Old Testament with the vision of Ezekiel. His words are certainly memorable ones! Now I recognize that the very idea of seeing a vast array of dead bones lying in a valley sounds creepy. It can also carry a note of sorrow for when one sees such a vision one must wonder how the bones got there in the first place. Had there been a great battle with no survivors? No one to provide a dignified burial for those who had lost their lives? Or perhaps there had been some type of dread disease like the Black Death or smallpox that had taken the lives of so many and left no survivors?

Whatever the case, the vision of Ezekiel leaves us troubled. We are looking upon a scene of human carnage and death. It is difficult, if not impossible to imagine life arising out of this vision of death. This vision cracks open our hearts and minds so that we can receive a word from God.

Then a voice comes to Ezekiel—the voice of God. God tells Ezekiel to speak to the bones and proclaim that life will be restored; that they will have breath within them once again. And suddenly flesh is restored to the bones. Bodies are reassembled, sinews and tendons and muscles and skin cover these bones. But notice that there is still no life within these bodies.

Once again, God tells Ezekiel to prophecy to these bodies and to order the breath of God coming from the four winds to enter these bodies and restore them to life.

Have you heard a story like this before? Remember the creation story when God spoke and out of God's words the universe and all that is in it: all of creation, comes into being. Remember that God breathed the breath of life into humans in the creation story. It is through God's power breathing life into that which appears to be utterly and completely dead that life is restored.

That's the power of our God. When there appears to be no hope, no future, no chance of life going forward God breathes and life is restored.

Ezekiel's vision is just one of many stories coming out of the Bible demonstrating the unimaginable power of God. We have the creation story. We have Ezekiel's vision God. Both of these stories utilize human imagination to express theological truths. The creation story was crafted to express the human need to give glory to God, to explain the marvels of God's creation on earth and make the claim that the God we worship is the creator. The theological truth expressed in Ezekiel's vision is slightly different. Notice that in the very first verse it is labelled a vision. Some would say "a dream." But story, vision, or dream, it expresses a theological belief that God is capable and powerful enough to bring life out of dry bones; just as the creation story from Genesis expresses the belief that God can bring life out of dust.

Bringing life to dead bones brings to mind the most remarkable story of all: Jesus rising from the dead. Once again demonstrating the power of God to bring life out of death. *(Pause)*

We haven't heard many gospel readings since the end of August. That's by design. First of all, the Old Testament readings were chosen to prepare us for the gospel of John which we will be reading from Christmas through Easter. Secondly, when we find ourselves longing for the good news we can more easily relate to all of the multiple generations of Israelites who faithfully waited for the promised Messiah even while very few words came from God.

This waiting and expectation is like peering off into the distance watching for a car to arrive with family at Thanksgiving or Christmas. It's like waiting for the text message telling us that the plane has landed and loved ones will arrive soon. Waiting can be so hard! Yet we trust and pray that in the end, the long-awaited arrival will occur. Now, my friends, these little examples are only a vague shadow of what it was like for the ancient Israelites as they waited for the Messiah.

Ezekiel's prophecy came to Israelite exiles living in Babylon. It appears that they were feeling pretty hopeless in their exile: like a bunch of dead bones. They longed to return to Israel and didn't have much hope that they would ever be allowed to go back. But through God's power, God's word breathing life into them, they were eventually allowed to return. New life was breathed into their dead bones.

We can look around at our nation and our world seeing crisis after crisis and feel like dead bones; like there is no life left in us. We can feel hopeless; as if there is no future for us. But Ezekiel's

message to us is one of restoration; a message of hope. There is a future filled with life for us. As followers of Jesus our challenge is to maintain our faith in God; maintain our faith in the creator who breathed life into us; maintain our faith in the one who brought Jesus back to life: a resurrected life; a new and everlasting life. This is the promise of God for us, just as it was the promise of God through Ezekiel's vision.

Again, I read Ezekiel 37:12-13: "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. 13 And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people." The impossible is possible with our God.

Hang on my friends. We lit one single candle on the Advent wreath this morning. It doesn't bring much light into our space; our world. But it doesn't need to provide a lot of light; it just needs to provide enough so that we are reminded of the potential; so that we are given a glimmer of hope. And that hope beckons to us asking us to remember the power of our God to bring life out of death. God is capable of accomplishing amazing things in this world.

In closing, please turn in your worship folder to the prayer of the day. I invite you to pray it with me, again.

God of breath, **You promised new life to your people in exile by breathing into a valley full of dry bones. Breathe new life into us, so that we might live passionately for you. Amen.**