

Date: April 6, 2014
Scriptures: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 8:6-11
Title: Them Bones, Them Bones, Them Dry Bones

How many of you know the song,
"Them Dry Bones"?
It's in your bulletin
so even if you don't know it
lets all sing together.

Ezekiel connected them dry bones,
Ezekiel connected them dry bones,
Ezekiel connected them dry bones,
I hear the word of the Lord.

The toe bone connected to the foot bone
the foot bone connected to the ankle bone
the ankle bone connected to the leg bone
the leg bone connected to the knee bone
the knee bone connected to the thigh bone
the thigh bone connected to the hip bone
the hip bone connected to the back bone
the back bone connected to the shoulder bone
the shoulder bone connected to the neck bone
the neck bone connected to the head bone
I hear the word of the Lord.

Ezekiel connected them dry bones,
Ezekiel connected them dry bones,
Ezekiel connected them dry bones,
I hear the word of the Lord.

As children,
many of us sang this song

at Vacation Bible School
or summer camp
without knowing what it meant.

I always thought
we should sing it at Halloween.
After all, Halloween is the time
to dress up in skeleton costumes.
We try to domesticate the things we fear.
We try to gain power over them
and reduce their power over us.
To be sure, death has power over us.
Like taxes, it is inevitable.
Halloween allows us to symbolically conquer death
if only for a little while.

The Hebrew people were as good as dead.
Five hundred eighty-six years
before the birth of Christ,
the Babylonian army defeated the Hebrew army,
overran Jerusalem,
destroyed their Temple,
and carted the nation's elite
off to Babylon.

There the Hebrews lived among a foreign people,
who spoke a different language,
worshipped different gods,
and lived life vastly different lives.

There, they built houses,
planted crops,
and dreamed of their home,
whose Temple had been the house of God.

That is not all they did, however.
They wondered about God's relationship with them.
They wondered if God had abandoned them
in that unclean place.

Over time,
some of the Hebrews adapted
and adopted Babylon as their new homeland.

Adapting is sometimes easier than dreaming.
It sometimes takes less energy
and certainly carries with it less risk.
Yet, others refused to be swallowed up
by the Babylonian culture.
They were the ones,
who dreamed of going home
and sitting in the cool shade
of their own fig tree.
As decade followed upon decade,
their dream began to seem ever more unreachable
and despair took root in their hearts.

Ezekiel was a prophet to the Hebrews
both before Jerusalem was sacked
and afterwards.
He was in that first wave of deportees
taken to Babylon.
he had warm memories of life in Israel.
With every passing year,
he saw their hope fade.

In response to Ezekiel's concern,
God gives him a vision.
God shows Ezekiel a valley of dry bones.
But, God doesn't just show him the bones.
God leads him through the bones.
From side to side, up and down,
round and round they go
through them dry bones.
Clearly, there is no life in them.
Clearly, the peoples' highest aspirations,
hopes and dreams,
fundamental sense of self,
trust in something bigger than self
lies dead in that valley.

It is a valley of death,

and into that valley,
 God goes with Ezekiel.
There surrounded by death,
 God asks Ezekiel,
 “Mortal, can these bones live?”
Ezekiel responds, “O Lord, God, you know.”
What does that mean?
 Does it mean yes, or no or maybe?
God’s answers the question
 by telling Ezekiel to prophesy and say,
 “O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.
 God will lay sinew on you,
 and cause you flesh to come upon you,
 and cover you with skin
 and put breath in you
 and you shall live.”

Like the Hebrews,
 many of us may have felt
 as if hope had dried up within us.

At such times,
 it is good for us to remember
 that God’s word to the them
 is also God’s word to us.

It is good for us to remember to
 “Hear the word of the Lord.”
Even though we walk in the valley of death,
 we can trust God walks with us.
God can and does restore our lives.

God is the God of the living.
This we know because Jesus tells us so.
(Matthew 22:32, Mark 12:27, Luke 20:38).
It is also Paul’s message to us
 when he says, .

 “God will give life to our mortal bodies
 through the Spirit that dwells in us.”
 (Romans 8:11b)

We can live in the flesh –

live to satisfy our selfish desires
and to venerate our accomplishments/ status/
possessions.

Or we can live in the Spirit,
live to follow the ways and will of God
as revealed by Christ.

Life in the flesh leads to death;
we become bloated expressions
of ourselves.

Such life begets darkness.

Life in the Spirit leads to life;
we become expressions
of God's love shining through us.

This life begets light.

Life in the Spirit comes to us
through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Today, right now, this very moment,
we can live in the Spirit.

Darkness no longer has the final say.

(The Text This Week, April 6, 2014, Romans 8:6-11, L. Ann Jervis).

Jesus' Spirit

enables us to take our eyes off ourselves
and turn our eyes to the world
in all of its glory and grime
and then work with God
in its restoration.

This is the Spirit's work;

It is also the work
of everyone born of the Spirit.

Lent is a time to ask ourselves,

"Are we dry bones or walking in the Spirit?"

It's a time to ponder who we are becoming,
and what kind of life we are living.

It's a time to ask,

"Are we living by the desires of the flesh
or the guidance of the Spirit?"

None of us can serve two masters.

As Jesus says,

“We will hate the one and love the other
or be devoted to one and despise the other.
(Matthew 6:24)

Now, it is never quite this simple.

We are never all of one thing
and none of the other.

Though we may have left old behaviors behind,
we can revert to them in times of stress.

Temptation is always
lurking just around the corner.

Yet, temptation will never have the final word
if we remember
that Christ’s spirit help us resist temptation.

Each of us is always in the process of becoming.

Christians are learning to say “no”
to death dealing behaviors and desires
and “yes” to Christ.

We do this by seeking
to hear God word to us,
follow in Christ’s footsteps,
and discover God’s purposes for our lives.

Lent is a time to affirm
that these bones, these dry bones,
gonna stand up and walk around.

This and ever so much more is possible
through Christ who lives in each of us.

Glory be to him ...
who came from the Father,
full of grace and truth...
and lived among us
that we might have life
life in all its fullness. Amen.