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Breathing Life (Dry bones and us)
Ezekiel 37:1-14

Rev. Jan Hazlett

It is an easy story to remember,
But I am so glad I am not Ezekiel!
It sounds to me more like a nightmare, rather than a mountain top experience of God,
It must have been chilling if not downright frightening, with the disintegrating bones,
The clatter of joining bones, the vacant stares of almost living,
God's commands, and the seeming impossibility of what he was expected to do...
In reality this story is not really about bones, or Ezekiel and his preaching
But it is a picture of God's presence, power, Spirit.
It resonates with us because here are times in our lives when we've had a dry bone feeling
Times when we feel cut off from God and each other and are spiritually dry.
This is not just the truth about life today, but was also the truth about life way as this vision was given.
Ezekiel was a prophet during a dark time for Israel,
When all their hopes and expectations of life, And of God had been dashed.
His latter ministry was to bring hope to those exiled in Babylon, after Jerusalem was destroyed.
God spoke to Ezekiel in powerful ways, including visions.
So it was that in the power of God's Spirit
Ezekiel found himself standing atop a valley full human bones
God asked Ezekiel if this brittle lifeless heap of bones could live. Well what would you say?
My immediate reaction lies somewhere between "You've got to be kidding!" "And I hope not".
But Ezekiel, wiser than I, remembered he was talking to the Lord of the Universe before he spoke...
With respect for who he knew God to be, he replies
"Only you know the answer to that O God,"
What a statement of faith! But the encounter, the vision was only beginning.
God told Ezekiel to preach to the congregation who were already long passed dead
Now there's a challenge for a preacher, it is difficult enough to preach to live people effectively
God voiced the expectation that Ezekiel should preach so the bones could hear God's word
Again, what a challenge, since ears had long since dried to dust it should have been impossible.
But preach Ezekiel did. Preached to bones that were crunching under foot and disintegrating into dust,
And bones began to join with bones, as the bodies reassembled and were clothed in flesh.
At first zombie like the bodies were lifeless, eyes vacant....
Again not exactly an ideal congregation for getting a message across.
Undeterred, Ezekiel awaited instructions, trusting God more than his own senses,
And then he obeyed the voice that was greater than all other voices,
And as he did so, Ezekiel's word and God's word became one..
As Ezekiel called, and God's breath breathed life into all the flesh enrobed bones
Remember the question? Can these bones life?
The answer was obvious, "yes, Lord, You can breathe life where you want God."
This message from God was the word Ezekiel was given to preach,
No matter how hopeless a situation looks, it is not beyond redemption of God.
God can breathe life where death can seem to us to be the final answer.
The truth was that Ezekiel's task to preach to the exiles seemed as impossible as preaching to bones
They were grieving loss of loved ones, of their way of practicing religion, of their way of life
Life had not turned out as they expected, God had not acted as they expected,
So they had stopped listening for the word of God to them,
Stopped asking God to act, their spirits had shriveled within them
They were disconnected, discouraged, and as unable to hear God's word as a heap of bones.
But the truth about God was that God had not forgotten them, had not stopped acting in the world.

So as often is the case, God called a person, this time, Ezekiel,
to remind God's people who they were and whose they were.
As a result of the vision, in the power of God's spirit,
Ezekiel spoke God's word reminding the people that that God was greater than their situation,
And as he preached God's word and Ezekiel's word became one, bring life
And God's spirit resurrected hope, and brought reassurance of God's presence and faithfulness.
The people's trust in God was renewed, and passed on and eventually they were restored to Jerusalem.
Through this story generations have been reminded of God's faithfulness,
God's power to bring life, into every time and situation.
This vision is recorded and words remembered for all times including our own, for all people, for us
To remind us that God is still able to breathe life into any situation no matter how dead.
That God still acts, hears our prayers, God still redeems people and situations.
I see evidence of spiritual dryness all around, and a need for reassurance of God's faithfulness to us.
When I encountered the following story in a book called "accidental Saints"
It resonated with the spiritual thirst expressed by many in this day and age, It went this way....
A movie-star looking fortune 500 company guy, with movie star looks wrote this for his congregation:
He said he was dry inside, that nothing he tried made a difference,
Not a website, or relationship
No new technology or video game
No exercise or diet or supplement
No job, or office or title on his business cared
No amount of diet cola or good scotch or bad beer
No self-help book, or therapist, or self-improvement class
No car, house or other status symbol that can be bought
"They have all done nothing more than temporarily anesthetize the longing in my soul to be complete
To be whole, to be connected, to be okay, to love and be loved as I am, with too much weight, or debt,
too much geek or gray and not enough of everything else"
He said he despaired that his trip on this rock flying around the sun must be a sick cosmic joke
But then he remembered the valley of dry bones where there was no hope of life
And God telling Ezekiel to cry out to the bones, to God's children,
To tell them to rise, Tell them to rise, tell them to listen and rise
And they, the bones, they the children listen
And God lifts them up, puts them back together
and breathes life into them filling them with God's Spirit
Bringing new life where there once was death, hopelessness and despair.
And he concluded,
hearing that brings light in the darkness. Brings hope.
And that is sufficient he says.
The truth about God for Ezekiel, for the Hebrew people, for all people for us,
Is that God's breath brings life, God's breath still brings life where there is death and darkness.
Today we gather at a table around symbolic foods that remind us
That God's breath bring life from any kind of death
We remember together that God is with us,
The Risen Christ walks with us, the Spirit breathes into us
Here we remember that no one is too cynical, too far gone, too dry,
The world is dying for you, for us to believe that God is not finished
Dying for us to act like we believe that God is not finished with them yet.
Can these bones live? O God, you know, you have shown us....now what will we do about it?