

“Finding God in Unexpected Messages of Hope”

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

Believe me, when I picked out this Scripture for our Lenten theme months ago, I had no idea what would be going on in our world and in our lives at this time. I could have never imagine that we would be saying goodbye to our beloved friend Burnie this week or that the fights in Washington would be leading us closer to a showdown or that we would so desperately need some good news right now for our world and for ourselves due to just things going on in our own lives, things like health issues, job issues, everyday life kind of issues. To be honest-when I picked out the theme and the Scriptures months ago, I was in my planning zone, the zone where I block out everything else and just try to focus on the details, where I try to get everything to work together. Usually in this planning zone my only worry is that I know it makes sense in my mind but will it make sense to everyone else? That’s the question that I am usually trying to answer when I am in the planning zone, not the question, will this Scripture match up to current events in the weeks to come?

Never in my wildest dreams would I have guessed that months ago this Scripture would be exactly what we would need to hear today especially when we are feeling like a valley of dry bones. As I shared in my newsletter article for this

month, I guess it goes to show me that if I am going to invite everyone to find God in unexpected places than I had better practice what I preach, mainly when I plan to preach on God's unexpected messages of hope, then I had better be ready for them when God brings me unexpected messages of hope!

So I invite you to turn in your Bibles to the lesson for the day.

Read Scripture

This is one of the most beloved stories in the Bible. We may have heard it while growing up in Sunday school or maybe we sang the song at church camps or vacation bible Schools. Just a side note-I know everyone is sitting there, singing quietly to yourselves, "Dem Bones, Dem Bones, Dem Dry Bones, Gonna Rise again". That's okay. The song has been going through my mind all week!

This is a great story, full of action. We can easily visualize Ezekiel being grabbed by God and being plopped down in a valley of dry bones. We can easily visualize the wind moving over the bones as they begin to shake and come together. We can easily visualize the bones coming to life. That's why we think it is such a great story for children. It can capture their imagination.

And it is so easy to come up with activities for it. Maybe a little bit of arts and crafts with some dancing skeletons, maybe a little bit of singing "Dem Bones" and maybe some snacks- some pretzel sticks. They sort of look like dry bones,

don't they? See we do all these things while telling this great story and children's Sunday School is done for the day.

But I wonder if instead of capturing our imagination, we may just be watering down one of the most powerful stories in our Bible. We may just be turning a hopeful vision of dry lifeless bones coming to life into a fun arts and crafts project meant only for children with no message or connection for the adults. If that is the case, then that would mean we missed the whole point of the story. I wonder if instead of challenging ourselves as the people of God, through our cute activities, we may just be weakening the Word of the Lord until it no longer has the power to transform our world.

I wonder if what we have really done with this story is lose God's vision for us as the people of God, a dangerous area for us to be in because that would mean that we are in danger of losing our hope in God.

It is my prayer that after today- we will no longer see this valley of dry bones just as another cute arts and crafts project meant only for our children but that we will see it as fertile ground where God's vision can take root in our hearts, in our bones and bring us back to life through an unexpected message of hope.

And in order for that to happen, we have to take a look at the context of this Scripture to reclaim its power, to reclaim its vision, to reclaim its message of restoration.

At this point in our Biblical story, the people of Israel have been taken into exile and the life that they used to know has been destroyed. Their homes were torn down. Their families and communities were separated on purpose. And the one thing that really gave their world stability, the House of the Lord, was razed to the ground. The place that they relied on to always be there as their spiritual center and their foundation of faith was gone and now they found themselves in a foreign land, thinking God had deserted them or even worse that their God who was all powerful could really be defeated by other forces in their world.

This was about as low as the people of Israel could go. They had given up hope. They had lost their community and worse, they had lost God's vision of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Why bother going on? Their world was spinning out of control. Everything was falling apart. They were about as dry spiritually as one could get.

And then Ezekiel has this crazy vision, a vision where God is active among a valley of dry bones, a vision that tell us God is still creating, a vision that reminds us God is still working, a vision that reaffirms God's promises to the people and brings those promises to life!

Talk about a crazy vision! You know the people thought Ezekiel had lost his mind when he shared this vision with them. They had given up hope and here, Ezekiel was talking about bones coming to life, and here Ezekiel was talking about

God restoring the house of Israel once more. All impossible things! Talk about crazy!

I'm not going to lie to you. Ezekiel's vision is crazy and this crazy vision was exactly what the people needed to hear at that time. They needed to hear that God had not forgotten them. They needed to hear that God was still creating. They needed to hear that death and hopelessness did not have the last word. God was going to bring their dry bones back to life and not only that, God was going to bring them home and restore them as the people of God once more.

This is crazy good news and it was exactly what the people of God needed to hear back then. Just like we need to hear it today. God is still working and moving among our dry bones, bring us back to life, and restoring us as the people of God once more.

Even though it seems like our world is falling apart, even though we may be as dry as we can be, God has not forgotten us. God is still working to bring about God's Kingdom here on earth.

Just look at the verbs in this vision. God is the main player. Ezekiel reminds us that God is the one doing all the work. He reminds us that God is the one who is active in this vision, the one who is active in our communities, the one who is actively working to restore us and to bring us healing in our lives. In this vision, Ezekiel is passive. Ezekiel is just doing what God is telling him to do. God is the

one putting things in motion, not Ezekiel. The same way God is doing for us today and all days. God is putting things in motion for us as the people of God.

That is why this Ezekiel's vision is such an unexpected message of hope! It reminds us that it is not within our power to solve the world's problems. It reminds us that the dry bones could not put themselves together or even cry out for help. Only God can do that. But that is only part of this unexpected message of hope. This vision of dry bones coming to life doesn't leave us without some response or responsibility in helping bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth. It also reminds us that we are called to be a body-The Body of Christ here on earth, The body that brings forth new life for all the people of God in our communities and in our world.

In this valley, the bones are dry and separated. They are disconnected from one another. And it is God who brings them together. It is God who connects the sinews, connects the muscles, and connects the flesh. It is God who brings these bones to life. And God does this through Ezekiel's words and Ezekiel's actions, the same way God is bringing us together as the Body of Christ here on earth. God is doing this all through our words of grace, our actions of love, and our visions of hope that we are called to share with all of God's children that we encounter in our lives, in our every day journeys. We as the people of the God are not the only ones who need some good news right now. All of God's creation is crying out. All of

God's creation is waiting for the breath of God to blow over it and bring it back to life. And we are the ones who are told to call upon the winds. WE are the ones who are called to be the vessels of that new life. We are the ones who are called upon to be a somebody with a body-somebody with the Body of Christ.

Now, I'll admit, that at first glance this unexpected message seems a little depressing. We can't solve any of the world's problems. We can't fix ourselves on our own. We are powerless. And our response to these issues has usually been so why bother caring, why bother trying? That's exactly what the Israelites said when they were experiencing the same depressing, life sucking news. They said "Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone, there's nothing left of us". They had given up already. They had lost hope and were preparing to lie down, ready to die.

But that is not the unexpected message that I am bringing to you today. I am not inviting us to wallow in our fears and worries. I am inviting us to experience new life, the life that can only be found when we look beyond our worries and fears and see the world through God's eyes, through God's vision. I invite us to take another look at Ezekiel's vision, to take another look at God's unexpected message of hope, this time take a look at through the eyes of faith, through the eyes of God. Sure, it may look the same on the surface but to us as people of faith it sounds so different to our ears. It may still be saying, "We can't solve any of the world's problems. It may still be saying, "We can't fix ourselves." It still may be

saying, “ We are powerless.” But there is a different in the tone. The tone is one of rejoicing and celebrating. It is a tone of thanksgiving. The tone reminds us that God is in charge, that God will make a way somehow. This crazy vision opens our hearts and our eyes to the many ways that God is continuing to work in our world. When we look at this vision through the eyes of faith, through God’s Kingdom vision, we realize that none of these concerns have a human response that can fix or solve everything! Only God can do that! Somehow God will make a way!

All of the life draining concerns that the house of Israel raised, all of our life sucking concerns that we are lifting up today require a God response. Only God can breathe renewal into human life, into our dry bones. Only God can solve the world’s problems. Only God can bring us healing and wholeness through God’s love and grace.

This is really good news. It is freeing news! Thankfully world peace and solving the world’s problems doesn’t only rely on me and you. I’ve seen me try to fix things. Sometimes, duct tape and ice cream can’t and won’t fix the problems. All of our concerns, all of our worries, all of our fears require a response from God. Not because God has the information to all of our problems but because only God has the power to make life happen! God will make a way somehow!

The thing we need to realize is that Here on earth, We can assembly all sorts of committees, organizations, and groups to figure out solutions for our problems

but we will never be able to see the whole picture. We are human. We don't really expect the impossible to happen. That's why Ezekiel's vision is such an unexpected message of hope. It invites us to look at our world through the eyes of God. Because Only then, will we be able to see how the impossible comes into being, Because only then will we see how dry bones come to life. Because Only then will we see the Kingdom of God in our midst.

Ezekiel's wonderful life-giving vision reminds us that we can assemble a working body here on earth, we can gather for worship each Sunday, or we can collect as many cans of food as we can for our community, all good things but they fall short of solving any of the worlds' problems. They fall short of fixing our problems. we need the breath of God to connect us and bind us together. We need the breath of God to bring our vision of God's peaceable Kingdom here on earth to life. We need the Spirit of God to be the body, to be a somebody, to be a body that matters. We need the Spirit of God moving among us, breathing into us the breath of life, calling our dry bones out of the graves and fusing us into the Body of Christ here on earth.

The vision of Ezekiel teaches us that we have been asking the wrong questions all along. We've been asking is what to we have to do to solve the problem when what we should have been asking all along is "Do we have a

future?” What we should have been asking all along is for the breath of God to come move among us and stir us to life.

What we've been asking is what program or get fix quick solutions can we implement in our communities and in our lives so that our body will function when what we should have been asking all along is: “What is the word of God calling us to do?”

Because here is the thing we need to remember. God spoke and there was life. From the very beginning of time, God spoke and there was life. The wonderful thing that we need to remember is that “the Lord's word always makes room for life, always makes room for hope.”

When we raise our vision to look beyond our worries and fears, when we raise our vision to look beyond what our mundane eyes can see, we will watch and do watch the impossible happen, the impossible come to life. We watch dry bones come together and become a somebody with a body that matters, the Body of Christ. When We see the world through God's eyes, we will begin to see that the Kingdom of God is in our midst. And we will realize that our world is filled with unexpected messages of hope, even when all around us is a valley of dry bones. May we always be open to the many ways that God is still working in our world, calling us to see this world with the eyes of faith. Amen.