

Rev. Dr. David Rollins

Lakewood Presbyterian Church

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Romans 8:6-11

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Breathing life into Dry Bones

I love this story from the prophet Ezekiel. When this passage appears in the lectionary it is always paired with the raising of Lazarus. The texts certainly have some similarities, most notably the image of resurrection. Both stories begin with a bit of sadness surrounded by death. Both also contain a positive upbeat ending. It might be helpful for you to know that I am an eternal optimist, and I absolutely love a story that concludes with a happy ending. So, it is natural that stories like this one from Ezekiel have a gravitational pull on my heart and my spirit.

The vision begins as Ezekiel is led by the Spirit to the valley of dry bones. Take a moment to think about that place... What kinds of thoughts, feelings, and emotions does this image evoke? The Valley

of Dry Bones is not a place any of us would choose to linger. It's lifeless, scattered, dry, desolate, and stark. And yet it is precisely here that God brings Ezekiel. God didn't bring Ezekiel to this place to show him what it is, but to invite him to imagine what it could be. The Valley of Dry Bones is a place that has seen a massive amount of death in its history, but that was long ago. When Ezekiel enters the scene the process of death and decay is over. The bodies are gone. The turkey buzzards, vultures, and every other critter that would have feasted on the remains have long since packed up and moved along. The air is dry, and the stench of death dissipated long ago.

Here in this place God asks, "Can these bones live?" Ezekiel answers wisely, "Lord God, You know." In this haunting vision we learn the power of looking beyond what is right in front of us. Stories like this one remind and encourage us to see beyond the reality of what currently is to the potentiality of what can be. God our creator, redeemer, and sustainer knows the potential here. There is a valley

full of Good bones. The language we use and the attitude we possess have a big impact on how we frame things and view life. (For instance the places we see a collection of automobiles that are no longer on the road behind a tall fence...Junk Yard vs Salvage Yard). Ezekiel found himself in the Valley or dry bones, dry but good bones.

Good bones is a phrase often used when contractors or people see potential in a piece of real estate a house that is long past its prime, very dated, or has been neglected and needs numerous repairs. If you have ever spent time on HGTV you have probably witnessed transformations like this one. One of the first shows on television that invited the audience to see this type of thing is called “This Old House”. That show began in 1979 with builder and designer Bob Villa as the host. In 2025 there are more than 30 such shows on the air that follow roughly the same idea. Some of the most popular ones are Fixer Upper, Fixer to Fabulous, Property Brothers, and Good Bones.

In a number of these shows' portions of the home and sometimes the entire home is stripped down to the studs. From there the bare bones of construction, the rebuilding begins. Can these bones live? We know how the story unfolded for Ezekiel. How would it have unfolded for us? Think about how often we put unnecessary roadblocks in our own way that prevent us from experiencing transformation in our lives and in the communities, we call home including the church. How often are we guided by the voices that rattle off all the reasons something might not work? (Capital Campaign at Westminster) One of the things that behavioral neuroscience has proven is that when we get into a critical mindset, we literally can't see possibilities or opportunities.

In this vision from the prophet, the bones represent utter despair and hopelessness—and yet, they also become a canvas for divine renewal. In the Feasting on the Word commentary James Wallace notes, “this vision reminds every generation that God not

only gives life but restores life, that death will not have the last word, even when all signs of life have been taken away.” In this vision God is not acting alone. In the step-by-step process to put all of these bodies back together again, piece by piece, sinew by sinew, and muscle by muscle, God calls on Ezekiel to be a co-creator in the work of resurrection. God says to Ezekiel, Prophecy to these bones and say to them, “Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!” There is a rattling, bones begin to come together. Bodies begin to take shape. We are reminded that nothing is impossible with God. The impressionist painter Camille Pissarro wrote, “Blessed are they who see beautiful things in humble places where other people see nothing.” The passage continues, then 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.” The N.I.B. points out that “the verb “to breathe” in v. 9 is the same verb that appears in Gen. 2:7 to describe how God, having formed a human body from the soil, breathed into its nostrils

the breath of life. Critics point out that the creation account in Genesis 2 is echoed here not just by the presence of the same verb, but especially by the fact that in both passages, the human body is formed before the breath (or spirit, or wind) enlivens it.” Ezekiel proclaims, I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. In Paul’s letter to the Romans, we are reminded that the Spirit of God dwells in us. Paul writes, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.” That isn’t just life, it is abundant life.

From a valley of dry bones to a vast multitude of new life. The passage asks us to see with spiritual imagination. Not just what is broken, but what God can breathe into life again. Fully embracing the metaphor means fully embracing the promise of resurrection. It begs us to look around and ask where we see dry bones in our

community and in our lives. Where are we being asked to partner with God? God may be calling us to pause and simply breathe. And yet God might be calling us to use our gifts to breathe new life into something.