

2,600 years ago there was a priest named Ezekiel  
who wasn't allowed to live in the Temple.

Instead, he was a refugee, an exile, with all the other people  
who had been marched out of Jerusalem  
when it fell to the Babylonians.

Before Jerusalem fell it had been about the same size  
as Decatur is today - around 25,000 people.

But the Babylonians took everyone away who mattered,  
and the 2 or 3 thousand who remained  
were people they thought mostly not worth bothering with - Leftovers.

And it was during that lowest period of Jerusalem's existence  
when God turned Ezekiel from a priest into a prophet.

God gave Ezekiel a vision of new life for the people of God,  
a vision where God revived first their bodies and then their souls.

A vision so beautiful, so daring and creative and wild  
that 26 centuries later it still inspires the people of God  
all over the world.

Ezekiel's vision of dry bones will be read this Holy Week in Nigeria  
at the mass grave of 12 Christians murdered there this month,  
will be read at Trinity Church in Three Rivers, Michigan  
where they've been providing emergency relief  
after tornadoes tore through their town,  
read in small Christian communities in the Diocese of Iran,  
and in the struggling parishes of Haiti.

And it will be read at churches everywhere  
who have had the simple burden of burying their loved ones.

On the most important night of our church year,  
Christians tell the vision God gave Ezekiel  
and they know it to be a forerunner of Easter morning.

“I will open your graves,” says the Lord God.  
“I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live!”

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Now, if you're feeling a little world weary these days,  
hearing God's vision for Ezekiel might bring to mind a hard question:

“Where's a vision for us?  
Ezekiel died 26 centuries ago.  
Has God sent a vision to anybody lately?”

If that's a question you've ever asked,  
friends, let me tell you some good news....

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A couple of months ago I was invited to a meeting of Decatur-area  
church leaders and city officials and relief agency heads  
to talk about the homelessness crisis in Decatur.

Everyone sees it. Everyone wishes they could make a difference.  
But most of us, Holy Trinity included, have mostly had to settle  
for being Good Samaritans instead of Ezeqiels -  
for bandaging wounds, providing sack lunches, MARTA cards,  
and warming centers, instead of transforming lives.

So I went to the meeting with pretty modest hopes,  
mostly about how to keep handing out short-term relief  
while managing the impact on our campus.

What I heard, though, was not modest. It was a vision of new life!

What I heard was evidence

that God isn't done sending visions after all!

The drivers of the meeting were two men:

Terry Tucker from Frontline Response

and Pastor Tyrone Barnette from Peace Baptist Church.

Pastor Tyrone has been the shepherd of Peace Baptist for 33 years. 33 years!

A few years ago they purchased a huge property

at Covington Hwy. and 285.

For those of you who've been here a while

it's the old Richway Dept. Store that later became Target.

I thought our campus was a lot to take care of

but Peace Baptist sits on 21-acres with 140,000 sq. feet of buildings.

That's triple the building space of Holy Trinity.

Their vision for the campus,

or maybe I should say, God's vision for their campus,

is for it to be not only a home for Peace Baptist

but also for 800 women, children, and families hoping

to break the cycles of poverty that hold them down.

And they are working with Terry from Frontline

to make that vision a reality.

Half of their 140K sq. feet of buildings is ready to be renovated

into a kind of 1-stop shop for these 800 people.

The drawings include emergency, transitional, and long-term housing;

medical care; counseling; hot meals; education; job training;

even pet boarding and storage!

God has given them a vision where they use their property  
to create a pathway to dignified life for those families,  
or to use Ezekiel's language,  
a place where God can breathe new life into people  
whose day-to-day existence too often feels dried up,  
forgotten, leftover.

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Now, this vision is not new - they've been working on it for years.  
And it's not original - there are places like it across the country.  
But maybe it's the vision DeKalb needs now.

It was so exciting to tour their campus,  
to learn how close they are to being operational.  
They think they'll be able to start welcoming people early next year.

And I'm telling you about it today for two reasons.  
First, to remember that God is not done speaking to his people.

The vision God has sent Peace Baptist and their pastor  
may not become Holy Scripture,  
but it is just as powerful, just as life-changing,  
as the one God gave Ezekiel all those centuries ago.

And second, I'm telling you about it because this is a good time  
for the people of God in Decatur to get involved.

They've got the support of DeKalb's new CEO,  
they're lining up major gifts from around Atlanta,  
and now they're asking for people to join their board  
or their steering committee.

They're asking for wise and capable people to join in this Kingdom Work,  
to bring expertise and time and money and commitment.

And y'all have those gifts.

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Holy Trinity provides a lot of emergency support for people who need it.

We're part of a network of churches and agencies who all help out.

But one of the drawbacks of having a network of help  
is that it turns poverty into a full-time job.

Come here for a sack lunch and maybe to get some groceries at DEAM.

Then to Threshold for MARTA cards and First Baptist for clothes  
and then to a clinic for medical care

and then line up transportation to get to a shelter  
for a hot meal and a bed.

And thank God for every one of those things. Thank God for all of it.

But after all that you probably haven't made much progress  
in finding a job, or helping with homework,  
or changing the realities of your life. How could you?

Pastor Tyrone and Terry think there's a better way.

They imagine you coming to the campus of Peace Baptist  
and finding a small room just for you and your children,  
a place where you can rest and heal,  
where instead of paying \$2,000/mo. for an extended stay hotel,  
you pay \$600/month for a room that includes  
3 hot meals, child care, and job training.

A place where the volunteers making sack lunches at Holy Trinity  
are now the volunteers serving hot meals for families,  
a place where the volunteers who gathered across Decatur  
come together to help people break the cycles that trap them.

Imagine how that could change a family's life.

Imagine what a witness that would be to the goodness of God.

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So they're going to need a lot of volunteers,  
and I'm hoping some of you will consider getting involved.

People who can give time and labor and compassion,  
but also people who know about finances and architecture  
and project management and security and contracts and social work.

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And one more thing.

Our Giles Fund was given to us for the outreach of the church.

The vestry has used some of that money faithfully

but we've not yet started thinking about a large gift -  
a \$1 or \$2 million dollar gift.

This center might - MIGHT - be the kind of place we should consider.

They're going to need tens of millions of dollars,  
so we wouldn't be the major folks.

But still, a significant gift from us could make a real difference.

But in order to know whether we should do that,  
we'll need wise, prayerful, and careful leaders.

People who don't just get excited and cheerlead like me,  
but people who know how to test a vision, to study a plan,  
and evaluate an organization.

I hope when the time is right some of you WILL serve  
on their board or steering committee,  
and that some of you will help us decide if this might be  
the place God would have us give a major gift one day.

In the meantime, on this Sunday of miracles and visions,  
this day when God brings life out of death,  
join me in giving thanks for the amazing things  
God is doing here for people in need -  
through the work of Holy Trinity & churches all across DeKalb;  
through relief agencies like Frontline Response, DEAM,  
Decatur Coop. Ministries, A Home for Everyone in DeKalb;  
through our police officers and first responders;  
through our hospitals and our city governments;  
and through individual sisters and brothers all over DeKalb.

All of it matters, from the Good Samaritan first aid  
to the Dry Bones transformations. All of it matters.

All of it makes a difference. And to God be the Glory!

Amen.