

From where you are... what do you see?
Ezekiel 37:1-14

Sermon by The Rev. LAMONT ANTHONY WELLS

I've had to wear glasses or contacts since I was in the FIFTH grade. I am near-sighted.

This means that I can't see very far in front of me.

If I take off my glasses I can only see a couple of feet in front of me.

The entire front row becomes blurry to me.

But when I put on my glasses, my vision changes.

I can distinguish faces and I can see where I'm headed.

When we follow Christ it's like we put on a pair of glasses.

Before, we walked around with no direction and no vision for life. Dead in our trespasses and sin.

But Christ gives us the opportunity to look at life in a whole new way.

Yet, if we don't learn to see things the way God sees them, we're going to miss the reality of what God wants to do in our lives.

The prophet, Ezekiel lived during a tumultuous time in Israel's history. The nation had become a shell of its former self.

The country had splintered and became two nations. The Assyrians dispersed Israel hundreds of years earlier.

Now in our text, Judah had become just as idolatrous as Israel and was heading for destruction.

The Russian Empire had infiltrated Judah...sorry.

I mean...the Babylonian empire reigned supreme over that entire region of the world.

They overtook the land of Judah and carried away many of its inhabitants.

You probably remember that among the first group of Jews deported was the prophet Daniel.

Ezekiel was in the second group of Jews to be carried off to Babylon.

Brothers and Sisters,
It's difficult for some of us to imagine the pain and suffering experienced by the people who have been carried away from their homeland.

Not only did they have to deal with the brutal treatment of their captors;

they also had to adjust to a completely new culture.

Ezekiel, after being called as a prophet by God, began to prophesy about the destruction of Jerusalem.

Yet, no one seemed to take him seriously, until it came true.

History reveals that Jerusalem was completely destroyed in 586 BC. All that remained of the once proud city was rubble.

Picture this; the people Ezekiel was speaking to in chapter 37 were a group of people with no identity, no hope, and no future.

Miracles for them no longer seemed like a possibility.

It was in the midst of this situation that Ezekiel says that he was carried off by the Spirit of God to a Valley.

In this vision, Ezekiel witnessed a valley of bones.

The floor of the valley was covered with bones. Perhaps, this valley was once the sight of a great battle.

The fact that the bones are described as dry, hits home the point that there was no life in them at all.

God then asks the prophet a question, "Can these bones live?"

The question that God asks Ezekiel is all about vision.

What does Ezekiel see? Does he only see his present circumstances or does he see the possibility of a miracle?

The prophet replies, "you alone know."

So, God tells Ezekiel to start a Reformation... Proclaim a Word to Re-Form the Body from the bones laying dead and dry.

God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones until they come together and re-form into bodies.

Brothers and SISTERS, I don't want us to take this moment for granted.

We may be quick to dismiss Ezekiel's actions as bold. But the fact that this was a vision doesn't discount the value of Ezekiel's decision.

God was asking Ezekiel to do something that seemed ridiculous.

Prophesying to bunch of dry bones is not the normal course of action.

Bones are laid to rest; they are buried.
They are not usually the recipients of prophecy.

God was asking Ezekiel to take a leap into the unknown.

God was asking the prophet to act in spite of what he saw.

Brothers and Sisters,
Ezekiel did as he was told and witnessed the resurrection of bones to new life.

God then began to explain to Ezekiel what this vision meant.

The bones represented Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off."

This was Israel's reaction to losing everything.

With the destruction of Jerusalem, they had lost all hope. They felt completely cut off.

They felt cut off from God,
cut off from their home and their heritage,
cut off from the miraculous acts of the past.
Cut off from their privilege and for power.
Cut off from their homeland.
Cut off from their inalienable rights.
Cut off from the way things used to be.
They felt Cut off ...

Has anyone in the building ever felt cut off?

The Bible says, The people could only see their present circumstances.

Pain and suffering were the only things that they saw because they didn't see things from God's perspective.

They were locked into the present. Instead, God was showing them the possibility of the future.

Through this vision, God was promising spiritual renewal to the nation of Israel.

This idolatrous people could be resurrected into a great nation.

From that point forward, the exiles from Judah could choose to be led by two points of view, their own vision or God's vision.

And Of course Israel and Judah could be great again, but How?

This is the problem in the text and in our world Today..

Most people ascribe to the belief that seeing is believing. **What you see is what you get.**

However, We are called for this hour to preach in a Post- Truth Era filled with Alternative Facts.

What we see is not always reality.

The first principle we learn from Ezekiel's vision is that we must not let our present situation determine our future outcome.

That's exactly what was happening to God's people. They were allowing the hopelessness that they saw to dictate their vision of reality.

We are often guilty of doing the same thing.

It's hard to have faith in the future, when the present looks so bleak.

How can I develop a hunger for God, when I don't even feel like I know God anymore?

How can I become passionate about serving God when our relationship has grown cold due to the pain and trauma of my experience?

Brothers and Sisters, This is what was going on in the text... The present can have a powerful effect on our attitudes.

It's difficult to see an army of the living in a valley of dry bones.

Yet, the beauty of following God is that God gives us a vision for a better future.

By looking to our God, we can see a future of blessing even when the present looks hopeless.

People of God... God has to help us let go of our tiny vision in order to release the greater good that is in store for us."

When we lead with God's vision, then we can have hope in the midst of any situation. We can believe that the impossible is once again possible.

Secondly, we must begin to act now on the future promise.

We must begin to act and believe on God's promises.

What are you talking about?

Most of us know you have to diet and exercise to lose weight. One of the hardest things about losing weight is the process.

I always hope that by the second day of the diet, that the weight is completely gone.

My clothes should fit loosely by day three, and by day four I can celebrate.

Anyone else hoped for that same diet plan?

We all know that isn't the case, though.

In order to obtain the future goal of getting to a healthy weight, I have to start exercising (acting) today.

I want to encourage each of us (Whatever it is) to DO IT NOW!... Whatever it is Speak to your Dry Bones ... NOW.

For many, our mission field, is troubled by great adversity and many of us that are just starting out are wondering Can these Bones Live?

Eric Garner and Keith Lamont Scott's Family are wondering, **Can these Bones Live?**

Renisha McBride and Sandra Bland's Mother want to know **Can these Bones Live?**

In this region, Philando Castile's Bones are crying out for Breath **but where are the prophets that will prophesy to these raging winds and BREATH Life in the Valley of this Region.**

How do we deal with these dry bones, dead situations, bleached and bleak realities....

what do we do? Well I'm glad you asked...

If the Spirit of the Lord is upon you and has anointed you to Preach... then Preach and prophesy...

Preach good news to the poor (economic justice)
Preach freedom for prisoners (criminal justice)
Preach recovery of sight to the blind (healthcare justice)
Preach for an oppressed free society (environmental and social justice)
And Preach and declare this time, these years as in the favor of God. (universal justice)

Some of y'all are not gonna like me for this... But PREACH the DAMN Gospel...

Preach THE Living Gospel and watch the wonders of the Lord our God.

And if you are gonna preach... DO IT NOW!

Dr. King at Riverside Church in NYC, said... “We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, and there "is" such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.”

Because right now I see dead and dry bones in the streets of our nation and in the pews of this sometimes Yet to be Evangelical Lutheran Church in America...

In our text, God gave the Jews this prophecy by Ezekiel for a reason.

This new hope **should** have brought out new behavior in the Jews.

The future promise should have changed the way they acted in the present.

Brothers and Sisters, There are promises God has given us for the future that we need to believe today... like never before.

We take hold of the future in the midst of present circumstances.

Somebody asked me why do I march and protest?

They asked me don't you get tired of yelling at buildings, **Yes, I get tired of standing before crowds hollering trying to make a dead situation come alive.**

But I'm crazy enough to believe that it's not in vain.

We who believe in Freedom can not rest until it comes...

Ezekiel is my witness to stand in the midst of the Valleys in our Society and Preach and prophesy Life and Recovery to dead situations.

I want to encourage each of you to Preach until times get better. Pray until something happens and prophesy until those things that be Not... Are!

There is an old song, **"I'm pressing on the upward way... New Heights I'm gaining everyday... still praying as I'm onward bound, Lord plant my feet on higher ground... Lord, lift me up and Let me stand...By faith on Canaan's table land; A higher plane than I have found... Lord plant my feet on higher ground."**

We cannot let the present times dictate our future and we cannot let the present circumstances dictate how we act.

If we as a church want to be filled by God's presence, then we must begin to continually hunger and thirst for God today.

I'm going to take my seat...

But lastly, **we must trust God to complete the miracle.**

There was no way that Ezekiel could renew the nation of Israel, just as he could not make bones rejoin.

The miracle was God's responsibility. (Bishop Ann... Pastors...)

Our frustration occurs, when we try to take over that responsibility.

It's our job to preach and prophesy...
It's not our job to make miracles;
it's our job to believe can happen.

We can't make bones come alive.

However, we serve a God that can make the impossible a reality.

If today you want to see change and transformation, you don't have to figure out a way to do it yourself. You don't have to make it a reality on your own.

Instead, all we have to do is believe that what God promised God would do, will happen.

If I'm sick... God is the Lord God that heals...

If I'm broke... God is the God that shall supply my every need

If I'm lonely... God is with us even until the end of the age

If I'm weak ... The Joy of the Lord is my strength

If I'm sad... Weeping may endure for a night... but Joy Comes in the morning

"Can these bones live?" Your answer depends on what you see.

Do you see things from your own perspective, or do you see things from God's point of view?

Can we as a church live? The answer is yes.

God has promised that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied.

We have the promise. Let's let go of what we see in the present and begin to act on this promise believing that God will make the miracle a reality.

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