



ALL SAINTS
PRESBYTERIAN

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE

FOR ALL SAINTS SMALL GROUPS

“Tragedy, Comedy, Fairytale” | Rev. Jordan Griesbeck | March 29, 2020

Ezekiel 37:1-14

“The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. **2** And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. **3** And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord God, you know.” **4** Then he said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. **5** Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. **6** And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. **8** And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. **9** Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” **10** So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

11 Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we

Intro Question

The Gospel is real and is the greatest true story ever told. Other stories of our time only seek to copy the miraculous themes of the Gospel. How does the Gospel narrative (sin, rejection, transformation and resurrection) continue to unfold in the midst of our current tragedy?

Background

Our time of tribulation is not unique to the narrative of the Gospel. It’s helpful to remember another hard place, a place where a man faced a dead, barren valley, helpless to change anything on his own. In 597 BC, Judah was chastised by God and exiled to Babylon due to their sin. Here we find Ezekiel recording the lament of an exiled people: “We have become old dry bones”. God chose Israel to be His special people, but much like us today, Israel rarely chooses God. Ezekiel is set down in the middle of a valley of dry bones. There was no sign of life, which is a lot like we feel now. This is Israel’s position before the imperial power of Babylon. They are hopeless. The nation will never live again. Defeated and now exiled, they are scattered among the nations like dry bones in a valley. Ezekiel doesn’t know how to make the bones live, but he knows who does. In v.3, Ezekiel answers beautifully “O lord God you know”. God brings Ezekiel into the miracle of resurrection by telling him to do what he cannot do on his own . . . *speaking life*.

The image obviously echoes the creation of humanity in Genesis 2. God created bones, sinews and skin, but there was no life until God breathed life into that body. Only then did Adam (humanity) become a “living soul.” God created life out of lifeless bones. If God did it once, God can do it again. Dry bones are no problem for the living God. His breath transforms death into life. Our dry bones today are much like Adam’s post sin. Romans 5:12 reminds us we are all infected with a disease of sin.

God’s vision to Ezekiel comes true 60 years later, when Israel is led to the promised land. Israel is given the opportunity to repent. It is a powerful image of the resurrection of the Jewish people after their sufferings. God, being rich in mercy, promised that he would restore Israel. He would give them life, fill them with his Spirit, make them his people.

And then there is the remarkable event in John 11 where Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. A precursor for Jesus’ own resurrection. Lazarus has been in the grave for four days, so that decay has set in. This is the context in which Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life” (v.25). Jesus is not there to heal Lazarus. He is now there to reach into the grave and give his lifeless body life again. When Jesus heard, he stayed two days longer (v.6). Instead of running to Bethany. Why? Jesus had a plan nobody else could understand - Lazarus had to be dead. Martha questions, “Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died”. Then Martha confesses her unwavering faith. “I believe that there is a resurrection at the end. I believe that my brother will rise on the last day.” For all of us in that moment, Jesus may not give an answer for our suffering. But he will give us his compassion and his tears...and he always gives himself.

The last part of the Gospel is transformation and its effect on us. In Ezekiel, Israel is transformed. In John, Lazarus transforms and in Romans we are transformed by the Spirit. All by the power of the resurrection! The same spirit that transformed dry bones, Lazarus and us! Romans 8 v.11 says “If the spirit dwells in you, gives life to mortal bodies.” If you are in Christ, you have come alive. You can become who you were made to be. Paul says life in the flesh, life by ourselves on our own is death. Life in the Spirit is life and peace.

The central image of these stories is the *breath of God* that has power over the graves. *God breathes* and dry bones live again. In Ezekiel v.12, God says “Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people.” *God breathes* and Lazarus is resurrected from the dead as Jesus cries out with a loud voice. “Lazarus, come out!” *God breathes* and His Holy Spirit is made alive in us to work out Romans 7 and 8.

This is the story of the Gospel. The spell of sin and death is broken. Spring is upon us. Our bodies are being awakened, renewed and transformed.

Jesus asks Martha in v.26, “Do you believe this is true?” Do you believe the resurrection is life? May our answer be as absolute as Martha’s...“Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. What significance does Ezekiel’s vision have for us today?
2. How are we like the valley of dry bones?
3. God was gravely concerned about Israel’s holiness. How does God show you he is concerned about your own holiness?
4. What has God spoken to you during this time of unrest?

are indeed cut off.' **12** Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. **13** And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. **14** And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord."

Romans 8:6-11

For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. **7** For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. **8** Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. **9** You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. **10** But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. **11** If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Romans 5:12

"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned"

5. Has particular sin been exposed that calls for repentance?
6. Read Romans 8. What assurances does this text provide as a path forward with new life in the Spirit?
7. Once Israel is returned to Jerusalem, does life return to normal for them or is there a transformation and renewal? Once our lockdown is lifted do we return to normal or is there a transformation and renewal in us?

Conclusion/Application

Heavenly Father, O God teach us in this time to be a people free of distractions that would be transformed by your breath.

*Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love,
And do what Thou wouldst do.*

*Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until with Thee I will one will,
To do and to endure.*

*Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Till I am wholly Thine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with Thy fire divine.*

*Breathe on me, Breath of God,
So shall I never die,
But live with Thee the perfect life
Of Thine eternity.*

Be merciful to me, a sinner. Give me life that is holy according to Your measurement. Grant to me a righteousness that implies right direction in Your eyes. Let me refuse to be satisfied with anything on this earth apart from you. As I admire and worship You, transform me in your likeness so I can pour out mercy, love and peace to those around me. Amen.