

**Holy Heilsgeschichte: Dry Bones
Ezekiel 37:1-14**

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Port Williams United Baptist Church
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Schools are meeting online these days, so I thought about given everyone a test this morning. I'm not, but if I did, and the question was, "What do you know about Ezekiel?" what would you answer?

Would you answer, "A: He was a prophet in the Old Testament." Or would you declare that, B: he was one of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles? (The answer of course is A. We all know that Leonardo, Raphael, Michelangelo and Donatello are the heroes!)

What do you know about Ezekiel?

My guess is that you know—if for no other reason than it is our scripture reading for this morning,

*Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones,
Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones,
Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones,
Now hear the word of the Lord!*

If you are a student of great Old Testament songs, you may also know:

*Ezekiel saw de wheel, way up in the middle of the air.
Ezekiel saw de wheel, way in the middle of the air.*

Perhaps a few of you know more, but for most of us my guess is that is about all we know about Ezekiel! If that much! I say that, because, if I can be confessional, until recently, I don't think I had ever read the whole book of Ezekiel. I have checked, and in almost 24 years of preaching I have a total of 3 sermons Ezekiel— all on this passage.

And with good reason. There are only a handful of passages from Ezekiel that are included in the lectionary.

And there is a good reason for that.

Ezekiel is crazy!

I say that therapeutically! He is in such need of extensive sessions with a whole team of counselors and therapists!

Ezekiel is in great need of psychotropic medication!

He is certifiably crazy!

At least that is what we would say today if he began walking the streets of Kentville, if he began preaching here! His prophesy is some of the most bizarre in all the Bible. He had hallucinations of spaceships in the air; he saw mythical creatures that would fit in any

apocalyptic movie; wrote some of the most blatantly sexually suggestive passages in all the Bible (you will go read the book this afternoon now won't you?); he ate whole books—literally ate them; was told to not to mourn when his wife died; and has enough bloody warfare to fill up the cineplex for years!

So we have to ask, why is this in the Bible? Who thought that this crazy crazy man was worthy of being included with the likes of Jeremiah and Isaiah?

Could it be that this crazy crazy man spoke the truth?

Remember, the Bible is really more about truth than fact! Prophecy is more about what is than what will be! Throughout his prophecy Ezekiel was telling the truth about what the people were experiencing. He was giving voice to their fears, their hurts.

The people were traumatized! The Babylonians had besieged Jerusalem for nearly 2 years, torturing the people the way the people of Aleppo, Syria are being treated today. There was no food, no water, no medicine, no relief.

When the relief did finally come it was in the form of exile. Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple razed, the best were carried off to a foreign land. There they were left to wonder again and again the very same question that we heard asked of Moses a few weeks ago? Is God with us or not? But now the question was even deeper. Having watched the temple destroyed, having seen so many of their own mutilated, they had to wonder if their God still existed.

Oh, it would have been so much easier for Ezekiel just to look the other way, to ignore it, to say that he had enough on his plate. It would have been simpler just to whitewash the pain, the grief, the suffering, to tell the people that they just shouldn't feel that way. It would have been more appealing just to divert their attention away from their reality with smoke and mirrors, promising them relief if they would just, just, whatever!

But that would not have been true! And Ezekiel, as crazy as he was, was going to speak the truth! He laid the blame for their predicament firmly where it deserved to be—on national leaders who had played politics with the truth, trading the national security for personal profit. He blamed religious leaders who turned a blind eye to the corruption in the temple that kept them comfortable. He blamed the people who didn't want to face the hard truth because it would force them to change. It would have been so much easier just to whitewash it all...but Ezekiel, that crazy prophet wouldn't!

It is so much easier today to whitewash the truth too, isn't it? In the midst of a global pandemic where every part of our lives has been disrupted—getting groceries is either an treat to get out of the house or an adventure that places your life in danger; we are told that everything is fine, and yet don't get within 6 feet of each other. Yet, there are those who tell us that in a few weeks that this virus will just magically disappear! In such a world we wonder who to trust, what is true, don't we?

Ezekiel came speaking the truth.

The fact is that the people were in a situation they never expected to be in. They could remember recent years when everything was good. Maybe that was what made this new reality so tough! They knew what it was like to be a national power. They knew what it

was like to worship in the grandeur of the temple. They knew what it was like to be so sure—of everything!

But now?

Ezekiel invites the people to one of the most macabre scenes in all the Bible. It is a valley filled with bones—picked clean by the vultures and buzzards, glistening white in the sunlight. It is like those black and white scenes we have seen in photographs from Nazi atrocities in World War II. It is the scenes we have seen in color photographs from Rwanda, from Serbia, from Syria, from countless atrocities around the world. Piles of bones, the remains of once vibrant lives, now just bleached in the summer sun, the stench long past. Lifeless bones, reminders of what used to be.

How did they get here?

Were these the victims of the Babylonian soldiers, massacring countless lives? Did these people fall to the famine of the siege, slowly starving to death? Were they prey to the disease that ran through the land—with no medical relief to be had?

How did these bones arrive in this valley?

I dare say that this was hardly the place where these people ever dreamed they would be; where Ezekiel ever dreamed he would be.

How many of us this morning feel as if that is exactly our situation. We never thought we would be in this predicament! Did you ever think you would be sequestered in your home, not venturing out from fear of a global pandemic? We have done everything right, and yet the financial collapse has left us wondering about next month's mortgage. We can't even come to church even! We are no longer sure that God is present, with us, listens to us or even cares! And we dare not even say that out loud, confess our hurts, our fears, our loneliness. We dare not confess it to others, to ourselves. Because....we are terrified of the truth.

Ezekiel speaks the truth! He sees the dead drying bones for what they are! The dreams of what used to be, the hopes that are no longer, a people whose future is gone!

Or so he thinks!

God asks the question. "Can these bones live?"

Can they live? They are bones! They are dead bones—drying in the sun! Can they live? What kind of a question is that?

It is a question that asks whether there is any hope. It is the question that we always need to ask ourselves—can anything good happen here? Or do we believe that it is over?

Is your situation beyond saving? Is the hurt too deep, to final? Oh, at times it seems that way. There are times when we look at our lives and confess the only thing we know to say—half out of desperation, half out of hope. Is this the new normal?

God only knows!

God only knows! But at least that recognizes that we have not reached the end of the story! It is a confession of hope that has not died in the summer sun. It is a cry that there is still the possibility, even if a slim chance.

But that slim hope is all God needs! Then speak to these bones, Ezekiel! Speak to these bones!

What a crazy suggestion! They can't hear. They don't even have ears!

But maybe God wants a little skin in the game from us! God wants us to invest ourselves, our reputation, our future just a bit! The situation may be desperate, but are we willing to do something, maybe something ridiculous?

Ask our spouse out on a date, the way we did that first time, terrified that they might say no, but hoping praying that they would say yes?

Take on a job at work that we feel is so beneath us, but one that gives us joy, that reminds us of why we do what we do?

Risk sharing an experience we remember of God in our lives, even though it seems years since God was really real?

Ezekiel, speak to these bones! Let me see your faith in action. Join me in the game. Lets see what might happen, together.

It is a crazy suggestion!

But then, like we know, Ezekiel is crazy! He begins to speak...and the bones start to quiver. He speaks a bit more and they seem to start to move—a toe bone connecting to a foot bone, then to an ankle bone connecting to a leg bone; over here vertebrae beginning to line up as a spine; there ribs forming a chest cavity; there skulls lining up to join full bodies! And then muscles and tendons and skin starting encasing these skeletons!

What a "Zombie Apocalypse" this is!

But they are not yet alive! They are just bodies. There is more to do!

Speak again, Ezekiel. And he does, and this time the *ruah* of God, the wind that blew over the chaos of creation, the wind that God first blew into humans in the garden—the wind, the spirit of God came from the four corners of the earth. The *ruah*, the Spirit of God brought those bodies to life!

My guess is that is what has brought us together today. Somewhere, from a place we can't even name, from that place that feels dead within us, God has called you. Get up and turn on the computer. Get up and hear the litany, hear the scripture. Say the words—even those that you aren't that sure of!

And see what happens!

Could it be that in that place where you never expected to find yourself, in that place of dry bones, of desolation, the wind of God might blow in you....that the *ruah* of creation might bring life to you, that the Spirit of God might cause you to dance?

Could it be?

Could it be?

Even this day?

Even in you!

Even in us?