

Lent 5  
Ezekiel 37:1-14  
Psalm 130  
Romans 8:6-11  
John 11:1-45

“ Dem Dry Bones”  
April 2, 2017

Dem Bones, Dem Bones, Dem Dry Bones, Dem Bones, Dem Bones, Dem Dry Bones, Now Heres the word of the Lord. You can't help having that old spiritual going through your head as the Old Testament scripture was being read.

But how about those bones? I want to spend a few minutes talking about what I call osteological ministry that is bringing new life to dry bones.

In the Prophet Ezekiel's vision, God showed him the valley of the dry bones. It came to him after God had directed him to prophesy the rebirth of Israel. (chapter 36). God announced, through the prophet, that Israel will be restored to her land under the leadership of “David, my servant who shall be king over them” Clearly a reference to the future under Jesus Christ the Messiah, descendent of David.. The dry bones represented the whole house of Israel, “dead” as a nation, deprived of her land, her king and her temple. She had been divided and dispersed for so long that unification and restoration seemed impossible. So God gave Ezekiel the vision of the dry bones. Those bones were disjointed and scattered. God said to Ezekiel, can these bones live? Can the victims of a catastrophe be brought back to life? Ezekiel didn't think so but God said prophecy over the bones, and when he did, the bones started to move and connect, the flesh appeared. God then said “From the four winds come O spirit, and breathe into these people that they may come to life.” Which they did in Ezekiel's vision. In the book of Acts, when the breath of the Holy Spirit came, lukewarm faith and passive apathy faded.

Maybe the dry bones were like the state of some of our church's today. There are those who may have made some form of commitments, then when trouble came they struggled at first and then just laid down for a rest

and never got up again. From here they started to dry up, they had lost their “go power” on their Christian walk.

With this being the last Sunday in Lent. maybe some are wishing it would just wrap up because we’re ready to get our coffee, chocolate, or favored creature comfort back. Others who are taking Lent at face value understand that these forty days are an invitation to the desert and to a time of uncomfortable examination of our lives and the motivations of our hearts, wanting a deeper awareness of who we are and where we stand in relation to God and our neighbor.

Throughout this Lenten season we have been reading long stretches from the Gospel According to John. This gospel is usually set apart as being very distinct from the so-called synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. In many ways, the Gospel of John is not so much a biography of Jesus as it is meditation on Jesus Christ and his reconciling work.

A hallmark of John’s gospel is the fact that it contains no miracles. Miraculous things happen in the gospel, of course, but the writer does not call them miracles; instead, the word “signs” is used. In John’s gospel, every time that Jesus gives a teaching, he then certifies the teaching with a sign. Today’s sign, the raising of Lazarus, is the seventh and final sign.

Can you imagine the anxiety of Mary and Martha, Lazarus’ sisters? Here they have been traveling with, working with, and likely funding Jesus and his ministry. They have witnessed wonders beyond description. Now their brother Lazarus, who is a dear friend of Jesus, is ill. This was serious, and they knew that Jesus had it within him to heal Lazarus. Can you imagine their supreme disappointment when Jesus says that he will wait to visit Lazarus?

When Jesus does finally come to Lazarus, the sisters and the village are in full mourning. Martha greets Jesus when he comes, not with words of welcome but words of accusation: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” One wonders what was going through her mind.

For you trivia buffs we are met with what is, in the King James Version, the shortest verse in the Bible: “Jesus wept,” or as translated in the New Revised Standard Version, “Jesus began to weep.”

The weeping came from deep empathy and grief. Certainly each of us has had those moments of wondering where God was in a time of trial or loss. “Why did God let him die?” “Where was God when I needed him?” All of us have wondered at God’s apparent departure. But sometimes, in that area of wondering, Jesus shows up, even after the death and loss. And his arrival is prompted by our raw grief.

The truth of the matter is that being as close as we are to our own experiences, we lack the proper perspective to see God in the midst of things, even in loss. To be sure, we may not recognize God’s empathic presence with us, but we can trust, somehow, that he is present.

It is the waiting for Jesus that is the lesson from Mary and Martha today. Even though all hope is lost – Lazarus has died – they still wait; for what, they do not know. And it is in the midst of this waiting that God sometimes moves.

Like Ezekiel, we may be called upon to be the one that helps to restore dry bone faith to those around us who have been waiting for God or have given up. We at St. Barnabas have done an extraordinary job of outreach in the community and outside the community. In about 30 minutes we will walk out of the door and when you do, you move from a St. Barnabas parishioner, fed and blessed to a member of what I like to call, St. Barnabas-in-the Fields empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring life to dry bones. All of us should be living proof of His power. Our task is not so much to commend Christ in words against which any argument can be produced, but to demonstrate in our lives what Christ has done for us.