



## Dem Bones – Touchpoint for May 15, 2024

### Ezekiel 37:1-14 (MSG) Breath of Life

**37** <sup>1-2</sup> GOD grabbed me. GOD’s Spirit took me up and set me down in the middle of an open plain strewn with bones. He led me around and among them—a lot of bones! There were bones all over the plain—dry bones, bleached by the sun.

<sup>3</sup> He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I said, “Master GOD, only you know that.”

<sup>4</sup> He said to me, “Prophesy over these bones: ‘Dry bones, listen to the Message of GOD!’”

<sup>5-6</sup> GOD, the Master, told the dry bones, “Watch this: I’m bringing the breath of life to you and you’ll come to life. I’ll attach sinews to you, put meat on your bones, cover you with skin, and breathe life into you. You’ll come alive and you’ll realize that I am GOD!”

<sup>7-8</sup> I prophesied just as I’d been commanded. As I prophesied, there was a sound and, oh, rustling! The bones moved and came together, bone to bone. I kept watching. Sinews formed, then muscles on the bones, then skin stretched over them. But they had no breath in them.

<sup>9</sup> He said to me, “Prophesy to the breath. Prophesy, son of man. Tell the breath, ‘GOD, the Master, says, Come from the four winds. Come, breath. Breathe on these slain bodies. Breathe life!’”

<sup>10</sup> So I prophesied, just as he commanded me. The breath entered them and they came alive! They stood up on their feet, a huge army.

<sup>11</sup> Then God said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Listen to what they’re saying: ‘Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone, there’s nothing left of us.’”

<sup>12-14</sup> “Therefore, prophesy. Tell them, ‘GOD, the Master, says: I’ll dig up your graves and bring you out alive—O my people! Then I’ll take you straight to the land of Israel. When I dig up graves and bring you out as my people, you’ll realize that I am GOD. I’ll breathe my life into you and you’ll live. Then I’ll lead you straight back to your land and you’ll realize that I am GOD. I’ve said it and I’ll do it. GOD’s Decree.’”

### **Grace and peace to you from the Mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.**

The story of the valley of the dry bones is a familiar one. And we all know the song, “Dem Bones”. The story comes out of the exile, and the destruction, of the people of Israel.

It is a word spoken to those whose world has been crushed, who see and perceive no hope. It is a word for them, and a word for us.

Who of us hasn't been at the end of our rope? Who of us hasn't experienced the darkness of life? Who of us hasn't felt at one time or another, “Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone, there’s nothing left of us.”

This is a universal experience.

And scripture does not back down from this experience. It does not try to hide it, gloss over it, cover it up. If one experiences life, one experiences disappointment, disillusionment, and despair. As well as joy, happiness and contentment.

This is a reality in which we live. It is a roller coaster at times. And the mistake that many of us make is that in the down times, we see ourselves as abandoned and forsaken by God.

Yet over and over in the biblical story, we hear and see that is in the dry and desert places of our lives that God does God's greatest work. It is in the dry and desert places of our lives that God's spirit breathes with greatest force.

I am struck that what are probably the three most famous times we hear about God breathing on humanity ... they are in circumstances when we are most helpless.

The first is in the creation story. God takes some dirt and shapes us. But we are not yet alive. We need the breath of God to live. Something similar to God putting the bones back together in the valley of the dry bone story. But there is no breath in them.

I find this line in the Ezekiel passage to be a most profound and sad line. The bones are put back together, but there is "no breath in them." By all appearances, they look alive, put back together. But something is missing. They are connected physically, the nouns, the bones, are all connected, but there is something missing.

And that is the breath of God, the breath of life. That gives meaning to our physical reality.

Isn't that how life sometimes feels? Going through the motions, by all outward appearances everything looks normal, connected... but something is missing?

The second story I want to highlight about God breathing into or on humanity is Jesus after the resurrection. The disciples are holed up, in a locked room, paralyzed from fear and clueless about what to do. The disciples' dry bones were without hope. And it is at this point that Jesus appears to them and breathes on them and says, "Peace be with you. Receive the Spirit."

John's words would take any first-century reader back to the creation story of God first breathing life into humanity. Only here, God is breathing a new humanity into existence, a humanity which knows that fear and death and hopelessness are not the final words in our lives. Life, hope, forgiveness and grace are. And those dry bones of the disciples were brought back to life.

And the third is this Ezekiel story where humanity is just a bunch of connected, dry bones.

In each of these situations, we have nothing to offer. We are without hope, unable to do anything. And here is when we hear God come, to us and to others, and breathe the gift of life.

We all have our stories. Stories of God breathing life into our dark places.

We have all experienced the brokenness of the valley of the dry bones. But we have also experienced the breath of God as it has come to us.

And come it does.

From the four winds it comes, from east and west, from north and south, according to the Ezekiel story. As Jesus tells Nicodemus in John's gospel, the Spirit blows where it will, and we know not from whence it comes or where it will go.

But it is there, constantly being breathed onto us and into us, from more directions and in more ways than we can see or perceive. That is the way it often is with God's breath. It catches us in the most unexpected ways and at the most unexpected times.

I want to share with you two stories from people during the Covid pandemic that exemplify this so well. It was a time when I was looking at the retreat center and wondering, "Can these bones live?" Because the pandemic did a number on this place.

One of them was named Linda Valenzuela. Now Linda Valenzuela lived in Philadelphia and worked in a hospital. She came home after a 72-hour shift and went to listen to one of her favorite songs on SoundCloud, a song entitled "Unstoppable," which just happened to be the title we had given to a Touchpoint. And which we had just put up on SoundCloud in audio form about one minute before she tried to listen to her song. I will let her describe what happened.

*I know a song like this so wanted to listen but instead got your sermon and you got no idea how much I needed that right now. I work in a Philly hospital and just finished 72 hrs with no break cause of this corona virus. Im trying to stay healthy for others butr really worried. Not a church goer, boring stuff to me, but not you what you said. Thank you a lot im going to listen to more because i need to know that God is there and for me and for all of us, how i got to your sermon I just figure had to be God no one else I know is that smart.*

Is that not the greatest comment ever?? ... ***"how i got to your sermon I just figure had to be God no one else I know is that smart."***

A week later, within 10 minutes of putting up the Easter Touchpoint, we got this back ... from a woman named Mary Hamilton ... and here is what she wrote.

*I got no church now and just saw your message and sendint on to friends cuz rt now uphevel is what our livs are no ester bunny no jesis jut lots of pane neede to here sumthing to lift me up thanks god blees you*

It was then that I realized that the retreat center wasn't a place of dry bones. It was a place that was breathing the breath of God, the Spirit of God, into people beyond those I could have imagined. Even though I couldn't see it. Even though I only saw dry bones.

So it was wrong to even ask the question, "Can these bones live?" Because the retreat center was already living and I didn't see it. And it took a hospital worker from Philly and another woman whose spell check wasn't working, to point this out. To make me see what I wasn't seeing.

Of course, if I had just read the Ezekiel passage, I would have realized it was not my place to ask the question. Because in the passage, it is not Ezekiel that asks the question, but God.

And God's not asking Ezekiel if the bones can live, as if it's up to Ezekiel. And that's why Ezekiel answers rightly, "Oh God, you know."

No, God is not asking Ezekiel if the bones can live, God is asking him what he sees as he looks at the valley of dry bones.

“Do you see just dry bones? Or something more? Do you see the potential for new life? Or simply the wreckage of history? Do you see the bones coming together in a new way? Do you see the breath of Spirit in them? What is it you see, when you look at this valley of dry bones?”

These were the questions that came up as I read the words of Linda Valenzuela and Mary Hamilton. What was I seeing? They were speaking God’s question to me, even as I thought I was speaking God’s word to them.

And I think those questions still apply to us today. As we look out on our world today, what do we see? What do you see as you look at our world?

“Do you see just dry bones? Or something more? Do you see the potential for new life? Or simply the wreckage of history? Do you see the bones coming together in a new way? Do you see the breath of Spirit in them? What is it you see, when you look at this world that seems only full of dry bones?”

Where I so often think I am looking at a world of dry bones, they were able to see a place of life-giving Spirit. Where I so often think I am looking at a world of dry bones, they were seeing a place that God has already put the Spirit within, and is alive.

We may look at our world and ask, “Can this world of dry bones live?”

But Mary Hamilton and Linda Valenzuela have already answered for us, “Not only can it live ... it is living. And God’s breath is blowing where it will.”

And how we got that answer from them, I just have to figure is from God, because no one else I know is that smart.

God’s breath be with your dry bones.

**Amen.**

## Opening Songs

### **Be Still**

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be still, know that I am God

### **Calm Me, Lord**

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.  
Still me Lord, keep me from harm.  
Let all the tumult within me cease.  
Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

### **Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

### **Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### **Come Drink of Living Water**

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Come drink of living water. Never thirst again.

### **The Meal**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

(Monastery Choir of St. John of San Francisco)

### **Benediction**

### **The Lord Bless You and Keep You**

(National Lutheran Choir, feat. Peter C. Lutkin)

The Lord bless you and keep you.  
The Lord lift his countenance upon you... And give you peace...  
The Lord make his face to shine upon you... And be gracious unto you...  
The Lord be gracious unto you. Amen.