

Based on Ezekiel 37:1-14

*Fifth Sunday in Lent*

*The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on 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."*

*So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.*

*Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act," says the Lord.*

Ezekiel 37:1-14

In this vision of the prophet Ezekiel, he finds himself in a barren place filled with the dried bones of an uncountable number of people strewn across ground, lying together in heaps; a literal valley of the shadow of death.

Now Ezekiel is being called by God at a time when ancient Israel was in a particularly bad place, during the Babylonian exile, after Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Babylonians and many people taken into captivity in Babylon. Their nation destroyed, their city levelled, themselves little better than slaves; the Israelites must surely have imagined that all hope was lost and that they had been abandoned by God. Though they still lived, it must have felt like death.

And yet, their story was not finished. God wasn't done with them at all. They had reaped the harvest of their hubris, but God's promises remained and through Ezekiel, God was trying to tell them that there was hope for them after all.

In our scriptures, this story plays out over and over; when it seems as though all is lost, God enters in from an unexpected place and redeems their suffering. We see it most clearly in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The world may lure us into sinfulness, and sinfulness into suffering; but God's love has the power to break the bonds of sin and free us to live in hope instead.

In our lives, many of us may, at one time or another, find ourselves in our own valley of dry bones, we may look around and feel hope is lost, or our suffering to great. But God's love is an ever-present gift for us if only we can open our eyes to see and open our hearts to feel it transformative power.