

LENT V ~ YEAR A: Ezekiel 37.1-14  
The Rev'd Canon Catherine Ascah  
St. John the Evangelist, Smiths Falls ~ March 29, 2020

When I first started observing daily office – that is Morning and Evening Prayer following the prescribed office lectionary, I was instantly struck by how the Spirit moved in the word.

The set sequence of readings, rotating through a 2-year cycle, which generally began at the beginning of a book, letter or Gospel and ran through from day to day without omitting any parts, invariably provided at least one reading which seemed to speak directly to me or my circumstance that day. It was for me – a good, proper Anglican who had not spent much time with her bible – uncanny.

Today is the fifth Sunday in Lent, Year A. Once every three years, on the fifth Sunday in Lent, we are presented with the readings we have heard today: Ezekiel, Psalm 130, Romans and the raising of Lazarus from the Gospel of John. And I am struck anew by the uncanny knack of the Spirit.

How prescient to hear the words of Ezekiel now, in this time. Ezekiel, raised up by God for Israel exiled in Babylon to bring hope to a people who had lost heart, who were suffering a death of the spirit, a living death in exile in a foreign land. Their temple had been destroyed; their holy city plundered, their leaders enslaved, their soldiers killed, and the rest scattered to far off places.

Ezekiel was speaking to the soul of his people, a soul gradually withering and dying, becoming as lifeless as a valley of dry bones. *“Mortal, can these bones live?”* God asked.

*Can these bones live?* God asks. You ask.

This vision, which was scheduled decades ago to be heard on this day throughout the church, could not be a more relevant question for us. Our temple hasn't been destroyed, but we are denied it for this time – a time that at first we thought would be a week or two, which evidently now will stretch much longer.

We are denied the tradition of gathering as a body, to worship together, pray together and eat together at the altar. We are fasting – fasting from all that we held dearly, fasting from all that is familiar. Fasting from everything except the word.

Today, today we feast on the word of God that was uttered through Ezekiel's pen. This vision of Ezekiel's is held up again today, when we are living an experience of dry bones as we start to feel the physical, emotional and spiritual toll that our period of self-isolation and strict physical distancing policies bring about.

*Can these bones live?*

Today, these ancient, ancient words speak the promise that only God can give us in these pandemic times. Today, we can feast on these ancient words as we hear God saying:  
*“I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live.”*

God calls the breath to come from the four winds and breathe upon those who have lost their own spirit. And so it happens.

This life-giving Spirit of God that breathed over the void and chaos in the beginning of it all, bringing light, order and life where there was none;

This life-giving Spirit of God that breathed over the valley of dry bones to reconstitute a body that had been destroyed;

This life-giving Spirit of God that moved forth from Jesus in the story of Lazarus and that was breathed into Jesus crucified, lifting him up to resurrection and life;

This life-giving Spirit that lit upon us at hour baptism;

This same life-giving Spirit of God is moving and will continue to move through this valley we are in, raising people into new life even if appears there is nothing but dry bones and wasteland.

Our Lenten fasting may well extend beyond Easter Day. It may be awhile before we can feast together at the Lord's table, side by side, elbow touching elbow, hands outstretched, to receive and share. But in the meantime, we can feast on the richness that is the word, The word which isn't some vague historical account or metaphor, but a living, breathing word that speaks the truth to us now.

Feast and believe in the Spirit of God, the divine breath that brings new life wherever it blows.

*Mortal, can these bones live?*

Yes, Lord. Yes, they can.