

Sermon: March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020- Lent 5- Focus scripture Ezekiel 37: 1-14- Zoom Church

Let us pray, WE thank you God for your words in our lives. For the ability that we have to continue to gather together for worship, even if our gathering is not in person. WE would ask O God that you hear the prayers of our hearts this day and that meaning and grace would be found in the words of my mouth and meditations of all of our hearts. In your love we pray. Amen.

I recalled a memory from my childhood this week, after reading our passage from Ezekiel. The narrative of the valley of dry bones has always been a favourite passage for many and has indeed, inspired some incredibly creative people in their song writing, in movie productions, and in a vast array of art in all forms. But it caused me this week, not to get creative, per se, but to recall a moment when as a child I walked out my backdoor to play in our backyard on a warm summer's morning. That morning, at least in my mind, was one of those perfect mornings. The dew still hung on the plants, grass and leaves; it was warm enough for shorts and a t-shirt, but still cool in the shaded places of the yard. The sky was a magnificent bright blue and the birds were of course singing for all to hear.

That morning I did what I often did on Saturday mornings, I headed straight to my sandbox and lifted the piece of plywood that protected the sand beneath it so that it didn't become the neighbourhood litter box. As I began to dig and build, I noticed something new in my sandbox: it was a giant black beetle, only it was upside down and its legs were curled in. I remember picking it up in my hand and thinking that it was the biggest bug I had ever seen, its body took up most of my palm.

I took the beetle out of my sandbox and placed it onto the concrete patio that was at the back of our house. The sun was quite warm in that spot and I thought maybe it would enable me to get a better look. I began to poke the beetle with a stick to see if it was still alive, but all signs pointed to it being dead. It didn't move, it looked dried out, it was for all intent and purposes a dried-up shell of what it used to be. After about 15 minutes of detailed research, I lost interest and went back to my sandbox; but every couple of minutes I would give a glance in the direction of that beetle and every time I looked, it was right where I had left it, bathed in sunlight.

I am certain a couple of our hours went by and covered in sand from head to foot I went about putting the plywood back over the sandbox and was brushing the sand off when a breeze came through our yard. I first noticed it because the dry sand that I brushed off my legs went much further than it should have. It was then that the dry shell of the beetle lying on my patio caught my attention again. The breeze was pushing the beetle around. Every so often it would push it a little closer to the shadow on the patio created by the house. I watched because I thought it was coming alive. But then realized that it was just being pushed around by the wind. However, when the beetle finally reached the shadow, it suddenly started to move on its own. It quickly righted itself and made a quick line to the trees next to the house; it literally bolted for cover. I ran after it trying to see where it would go, how this beetle that I was certain was dead, was now alive but once it reached the trees and the dirt and the leaves on the ground it was gone. Out of sight, but very much alive.

I can recall sitting next to the tress and wondering to myself how that beetle had fooled me for so long? How it had been able to lay perfectly still, not move or even flinch as I poked it with a stick, or moved it out into the hot baking sun? I found it so incredible that what I thought was long dead, had suddenly come back to life and raced away to live in the undergrowth of the trees. I was amazed and for days afterwards I came back to that exact spot hoping to find the beetle; to catch a glimpse of it living its new life.

As a child I never connected that memory to my faith, then it was just a cool experience with a big bug, but today I do; today, especially in the wilderness that we are currently in, I see in that beetle a really important reminder for us all. We just had read for us the narrative of the dry bones from Ezekiel. The narrative describes for us a conversation between the prophet and God and we hear how God was going to make a valley filled with the elements of death into something life giving; something new and wonderful. Historically speaking this valley of dry bones symbolized the house of Israel, a whole nation of people. Ezekiel is prophesying to the exiles, those who had seen their great city destroyed, those who had witnessed their identity as a nation stamped out by the Babylonians. These exiles quite literally are this valley of dry bones; a people whose identity is gone, a people who had forgotten about their God, a people disconnected, lifeless and lost; a people without hope.

But God in the midst of that hopelessness said to Ezekiel even when all you see is death and destruction, I see what can be. I see the new life; that like the spring which blossoms out of the cold harshness of winter, hope abounds. And so before Ezekiel's eyes the bones come back together, muscles form, figures begin to appear and the breath of God, comes upon them and the spirits of the people rise. Hope is offered, felt and experienced.

I cannot think of a better message for us to hear today as we face this really challenging time in our lives, in our community and around the world. I have tried really hard to not to be overwhelmed by just how bad the situation has become. But the truth is we don't need the news to show us the harshness of this time; the fact that I and my family have remained in our home for the better part of two weeks reminds me of that. I don't need the news to tell me things are bad, because I felt the eerie feeling that came upon me as I gathered groceries with my wife this week at Costco. I don't need to hear the news to see the fear and the worry in people's eyes, hearts and minds. Our world, looks and feels like a valley of dry bones; it literally feels like we are stuck in a hopeless situation. But friends, as we look upon this harshness, as we see and feel the worry and fear, I would remind you of what Ezekiel saw; he too saw a valley of bones, literally a valley of death. But as he looked upon this hopelessness, God began to work and God showed him and all the people where the hope was found.

We don't want to look at this valley of dry bones, we don't want to see this virus spreading throughout the world. But what this passage seeks to remind us of, is that even when things look hopeless, with God's help we can begin to see new life. As our reading for Ecclesiastes reminded us, it is only when you have experienced sorrow, that you can know the importance of joy. It's only when you have known conflict, that you know the importance of peace? Maybe more familiar to us it's only when you have experienced a time of refraining from embracing, that you realize the importance of an embrace? Life is filled with opposites, but God is found in them all. The message of the Christian faith, the message of Jesus life and ministry was all about new life being breathed upon the people who faced hardship, death and destruction. The Easter account is the story of new life out of death; of hope being revealed within the hopelessness. AS faithful people then our call in this time is to live fully into that promise, to hold

fast to hope, to look into the face of that which is most hard to face and to look for signs of new life, to look for hope.

What's most important about this passage from Ezekiel is not that bones came to life or that the nation was reborn, but it was the promise that God's hope could enliven us; kind of like that beetle in my back yard, what a hopeless situation that must have been for that beetle, with this little kid poking it and leaving it out in the hot sun, but it never lost hope and when the time came it's spirit to move and get to shelter was incredible. I for one need to feel the renewed Spirit in my life. We all need to find those things around us in this time that bring us life, that offer us hope. It does us no good to sit and long for what we once had or what we once were able to do. It does us not good to just wish for things to get back to normal. Instead we are called to find the ways that our Spirits in this time, in this new reality, can be enlivened; its our call to live in hope.

When you stop and think we have all seen new life in the midst of this time; its in the connections with family and friends that we have made the time to connect with. So many people have said to me over this last week that they absolutely love and deeply appreciate the phone calls and the face times; the connections they have with friends and family. Hope is found in the time we are taking to sit and eat with members of our families, rather than eating in front of the TV and rushing on to the next things. It's in the ways we are re-discovering passions that have long been forgotten. Hope is in the those working on the front lines of this crisis; their hope guides them to keep fighting to help and care for their neighbours. All around us is new life; in this valley of dry bones there is Hope; we like Ezekiel must learn to look past the hopelessness to see that hope. So, I invite you my friends to do just that, to find the hope that is present, to trust in God's presence, to trust that with God's help we can see a new day. May we choose to live in that hope in this time and forevermore. Thanks be to God. Amen.