

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Resurrection of the Dry Bones

37 The hand of the LORD was upon me. He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley, which was full of bones. ²He had me pass through them and go all over among them. There were very many on the valley floor, and they were very dry.

³He said to me, "Son of man, can these dry bones live?" I answered, "LORD God, you know." ⁴Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.'"

⁵This is what the LORD God says to these bones.

I am about to make breath enter you so that you will live. ⁶I will attach tendons to you. I will put flesh back on you. I will cover you with skin and put breath in you, and you will live. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

⁷So I prophesied as I had been commanded, and as I was prophesying there was a noise, a rattling, as the bones came together, one bone connecting to another. ⁸As I watched, tendons were attached to them, then flesh grew over them, and skin covered them. But there was no breath in them.

⁹Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the wind. Prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind that this is what the LORD God says. From the four winds, come, O wind, and breathe into these slain so that they may live."

¹⁰So I prophesied as he commanded me. Breath entered them, and they came back to life. They stood on their feet, a very, very large army.

¹¹Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They are saying, 'Our bones are dried up. Our hope is lost. We have been completely cut off.'

¹²Therefore, prophecy and say to them that this is what the LORD God says. My people, I am going to open your graves and raise you up from your graves and bring you back to the soil of Israel. ¹³Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and raise you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live. I will settle you on your own land, and you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD."

Breathe

I.

"There is a new normal." That seems to be a phrase people like to use. What "new normal" really means is that nothing is the same. Everything that *used* to be normal is shattered. Life is completely upended. Every facet of life is affected.

Businesses are destroyed. You can't go where you wanted to go. You can't do what you want to do. Your freedoms are restricted. Even worship is affected. A "new normal" takes a person's breath away.

The Psalmist wrote about it. "Beside the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, and, yes, we wept as we remembered Zion. ²There we hung up our lyres on the willows, ³because there our captors asked us for words of a song, and our tormentors asked for a happy song: 'Sing for us one of the songs of Zion!'" (Psalm 137:1-3, EHV). How can anyone sing happy songs when you're sobbing? How can one sing when you can't even breathe?

You see, the "new normal" I am referring to is *not* our own current situation. Israel was in exile in Babylon. Their whole way of life had been destroyed. Businesses were shut down. Farmers and ranchers couldn't even work on their lands and with their crops. Most of them

had been exiled along with the city-dwellers.

Prophets were not exempt from the “new normal.” Ezekiel was one of those who had been taken into exile, too.

Why this “new normal” for Israel? Why the exile?

“The hand of the LORD was upon me. He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley, which was full of bones. ²He had me pass through them and go all over among them. There were very many on the valley floor, and they were very dry” (Ezekiel 37:1-2, EHV).

The vision begins to explain the *real* reason for the new normal. The exiles knew Israel’s recent history. The book of 2 Kings describes the problem. King after king in Israel is described as “doing evil in the eyes of the Lord.” Each wicked king led the people in a similar wicked path.

“Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They are saying, “Our bones are dried up. Our hope is lost. We have been completely cut off”’” (Ezekiel 37:11, EHV).

The new normal was a spiritual condition that had become so severe that it could be described by a valley floor filled with nothing but dry, dusty bones. That visional valley showed spiritual death. It was awful. It was extensive. There was no hope. Spiritual death reigned supreme. It reigned supreme among the people who had been set apart to be the people of God. If it weren’t so sad, it would have been disgusting.

“He said to me, ‘Son of man, can these dry bones live?’” (Ezekiel 37:3, EHV). Dried out old bones were far beyond sitting sobbing by the river banks of Babylon. Dry, dusty bones were well past having their breath taken away. Hopelessness. *That* was the new normal.

II.

Breathing is not overrated. If you experience difficulty of breathing, you quickly come to realize how important is every breath.

When we breathe in, our diaphragms contract and move downward so the space in our chest cavity increases. Lungs expand. Air is pulled in. Oxygen goes to the blood. Carbon dioxide moves into the lungs and then is forced out as we exhale. The average person takes about 25,000 breaths per day. The whole process is pretty amazing.

Try to breathe with an N-95 mask in front of your nose and mouth for awhile. It becomes a chore.

God’s people haven’t been breathing very well spiritually. Something blocks the process—something makes our spiritual breathing labored and limited. Something sucks the spiritual breath right out of us and leaves us breathless—a bag of dusty bones sitting in the valley with all the rest of them.

Spiritual breathlessness comes from a focus on the people and things of this world rather than God. Spiritual breathlessness comes from sin.

Sin crouches at our door, like it did for Cain with the murder of Able. Sin crops up when we focus on the things of this world, like the job, the promotion, the 401k, the fancy car. Sin crouches when we elevate people—people from whom you *don’t* want to social distance—your friends—the gathering together for parties to celebrate anniversaries and birthdays and other life events.

“Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They are

saying, “Our bones are dried up. Our hope is lost. We have been completely cut off” (Ezekiel 37:11, EHV). There’s a new normal—an exile. We have been cut off.

God is calling you back. He is calling you to repentance.

III.

“Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to these bones and say to them, “Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.”’⁵ This is what the LORD God says to these bones. I am about to make breath enter you so that you will live” (Ezekiel 37:4-5, EHV).

This is a great passage to understand what “prophecy” means in biblical terms. Often God’s prophets looked into the future and predicted things to come.

Here, it’s different. “Prophecy to the bones.” Tell them to “hear the word of the Lord.” Prophecy means to “speak God’s Word to people.”

The writer to the Hebrews says: “The word of God is living and active” (Hebrews 4:12, EHV). The living Word of God comes even to dry, dusty spiritual bones.

“Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to the wind. Prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind that this is what the LORD God says. From the four winds, come, O wind, and breathe into these slain so that they may live’” (Ezekiel 37:9, EHV). The word for “wind” in the Hebrew is the same word as the word for “Spirit.” Where the Word of God is, there is the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is the wind that blows the breath of life.

“This is what the LORD God says to these bones. I am about to make breath enter you so that you will live” (Ezekiel 37:5, EHV). The Hebrew word for “breath” is also the same as the word for “Spirit.” I am about to make my *Spirit* enter you so that you will live.

He sends his Spirit when we are dead. God sends his Spirit to us at the driest, dustiest of times.

IV.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus stood at the graveside of his friend Lazarus. He shouted at the tomb: “Lazarus, come out!” (John 11:43, EHV). The dead body of Lazarus was dead no longer. At the sound of Jesus’ voice, Lazarus received a new breath of life.

“I prophesied as he commanded me. Breath entered them, and they came back to life. They stood on their feet, a very, very large army” (Ezekiel 37:10, EHV). The spiritually dead came back to life in Ezekiel’s vision.

There is a new normal. A new normal of spiritual renewal given by God.

Breathe, dear people of God! What an opportunity we have been given! Through the clutter of the world, through all the things that would steal our focus away from *him*, God has given us a unique opportunity to take a breath.

Push aside the things that might have distracted you in the past. Focus on breathing in the Spirit of God as he continues to guide and direct you in paths of righteousness. You have been *given* the breath of life in Jesus. Live in your new life.

In the first verse of our Second Lesson today, Paul gives us a sure comfort and hope: “If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also make your mortal bodies alive through his Spirit, who is dwelling in you” (Romans 8:11, EHV).

Jesus gives the best breath of all for the weary and heavy-laden; he gives the best breath for the crushed in spirit, for the despised and the lonely. Breathe, dear people of God! Jesus has given a breath of fresh air that revitalizes your driest life. He gives such a breath of life that it extends even beyond the grave.

Breathe. Breathe easy in Jesus. Amen.