

***“Can These Bones Live?”***

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Ezekiel 37:1-14

Israel was no more. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen about 100 years before Ezekiel came onto the prophetic scene. Judah, the Southern Kingdom, had experienced turbulence for many years and finally, around 598 BC, Jehoiachin was carted off into exile by the Babylonians. It was during this low point in Israel's history that Ezekiel received his prophetic call. Ezekiel had seen his homeland torn asunder by the pillaging Babylonians and he, along with the king and thousands of other leaders, was forced into Babylonian bondage. Like a slave in a foreign land, he longed for his homeland. As he heard reports of the fall of his beloved city Jerusalem in 587 BC and the destruction of the holy temple, he must have felt absolutely hopeless. To heap tragedy on top of tragedy, his wife died on the same day Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. It was a dreadfully hopeless period in the history of Israel. Ezekiel had lost everything...his homeland, his family, his roots, and his temple. He was a man in exile!

And it was at this low point that God took Ezekiel to a valley filled with nothing but dry bones. Not a breath of hope in the whole valley...just mile after mile of dusty, dry bones. How depressing that valley view must have been to Ezekiel. He had to have been wondering what good could ever come out of a valley of dry bones.

**37** 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. <sup>2</sup>He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. <sup>3</sup>He said to me, ***“Mortal, can these bones live?”*** I answered, ***“O Lord God, you know.”*** <sup>4</sup>Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. <sup>5</sup>Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup>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.” <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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.*** <sup>9</sup>Then he said to me, "Prophecy 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.***" <sup>10</sup>I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. <sup>11</sup>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.' <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup>***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. The Word of the Lord...***

The Lord asked Ezekiel, "*Can these bones live?*" To which Ezekiel responds, "*I haven't a clue but I bet you know.*" God was about to show Ezekiel what only God can do....breathe new life into dry, lifeless bones. But take special notice that God enlists Ezekiel's help. God told Ezekiel, "***Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. <sup>5</sup>Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup>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 Ezekiel did as he had been commanded and Ezekiel prophesied to those dry bones that God was going to put breath into those bones and that God would cause those bones to live and through this all will know that God did it. Ezekiel began to hear a rattling and a clacking throughout the valley. Lo and behold, it was bone connecting to bone...the toe bone connected to the foot bone, foot bone connected to the ankle bone.

Remember that old spiritual “Dem Bones, Dem Dry Bones?” It was happening before Ezekiel’s very eyes! Then Ezekiel saw flesh covering those bones.

But there was still something missing....there was no breath in dem bones. The bodies looked like people but they remained lifeless! Once again God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the lifeless people standing in the valley.

**“Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”** *What a marvelous opportunity for Ezekiel to call forth the breath....the Spirit that those bones may live.*

“*Can these bones live,*” God asks Ezekiel. We all come to seasons of our lives when we ask ourselves that question... *can these bones live?* More than ever, we are asking that question here at Fairmont. It’s a good place to be because with the question comes the same opportunity Ezekiel had....to pray for the breath of God’s Spirit that we may live! Fairmont has quite a challenge....*can these bones live?*

I see a lot of death. Within the last month or so, I have officiated at the funerals of *Arlone Campigotto, Esther Kelly, Betty Stanley* and *Marguerite Bowden*. I have blessed and said good-bye to *Louise Howard* who moved to Denver to live closer to her daughter, and *Bill and Lorraine Maxwell* who moved to Wichita to live close to their son.

Within the last year I have said good-bye to *Mike and Pam Matzko* who chose to retire in South Carolina.

Within the last month I have served communion to *Jim Lynn* and *Ruth Smith* who both lamented that their spirit is willing and they would love to be with us in worship but they don’t have the strength.

We have or will soon be saying good-bye to faithful staff members...*Norma Grillot, Joe Beal* and *Nadia Stropich*. You may have noticed in today’s bulletin that the hub of our office, receptionist, *Robin Penno*, has submitted her letter of resignation effective May 27<sup>th</sup>. Like I sad, “*I see and live with a lot of death and loss.*”

Can these bones live? As I prayed this question to God, God answered me and said, “*Bob, look around and see the vital signs. Look for the many ways my Spirit is moving at Fairmont! Look and you will see that I am putting my Spirit within these people that they might know that it is I, the Lord God, who is bringing this new life!*”

Even in the midst of much death and departure, I see many vital signs of God’s Spirit moving in our congregation. Some of the vital signs I see.....

...**you** are here. You could have chosen to be in a hundred different places this morning but you are here. Your presence is a vital sign that you care about Fairmont. I have also been hearing of many who are praying for Fairmont....using the Season of Prayer for Fairmont cards. I see your presence and your prayers as a vital sign of the Spirit’s presence.

...last Sunday we had two sets of ***elders taking communion to shut-ins***. ***Harry Bradbury and Max Schneider*** took communion to Dr. Don and Marge Sando and ***Ken MacKenzie and Gary Yagley*** took communion to Rev. Nehemias and Emma Garcia and Stan and Alma Gessaman. By next month I hope to add two more elder/deacon communion teams. I see this lay communion ministry as a vital sign of the Spirit’s presence.

...two Sundays ago, ***Lisa Shearer preached*** and I believe this was of God because the response, whether you agreed with her points or not, has been phenomenal. We have had to go to a third printing of her sermon....that has never happened with my sermons! Her sermon has people talking about youth ministry, congregational unity, bridging the generation gap. I see Lisa’s sermon as a vital sign of the Spirit’s presence!

...while some of you don’t think of financial stewardship as a spiritual matter, it really is. I remind you, again, that ***139 people increased their pledge for 2011 by an average of 11%*** compared to only 55 people increasing their pledge last year. I see your financial commitment as a vital sign of the Spirit’s presence!

....with less staff leadership, I see people stepping up to offer leadership like **Gary and Donna Yagley** who have offered to organize Vacation Bible School. Following worship our Session will be meeting with the youth of our church to discuss the future of Youth Ministry. This Wednesday evening a group of leaders will meet for the first time to begin a Vision process for the future of Fairmont. I see leadership coming from the people as a vital sign of the Spirit's presence!

....a couple of weeks ago, at a Lenten Study Group, Pastor Denise shared her sorrow about her brother Garland's suicide. Denise was so thankful for the response of that group and especially **Joyce Keenan** who, without prompting, invited the group to gather in a prayer circle in which Joyce offered a prayer for Denise. Later Joyce said, "**I would not have done that 14 years ago.**" I see people in the pews praying for people in the pulpit as a vital sign of the Spirit's presence! I might add that I have been touched by the many ways you have responded to Denise.

....several weeks ago we welcomed nine new members into our membership. I believe God brought these new members to Fairmont and they are part of the breath of life God's Spirit is bringing to us. We ask our new members to fill out a short thumb nail sketch of themselves and **Sara Grillot** answered the question, *What attracted me to Fairmont....* "**Looking for a church with warm, friendly pastor & people....Found it!**" I see people finding a spiritual home as a vital sign of the Spirit's presence!

There are many other vital signs I could mention. I would love to hear from you about the vital signs you see....email me! But I have one more and I invite one of our new members, **Sarah Budgen** wife of new member **Howard Bugden** and daughter of **Jane Heywood** to come forward to share.

**(Sarah to share about the new ministry Vital Signs)**

***"We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."*** Romans 8:28

*Can these bones live?* Yes! And these bones are living because God is putting God's Spirit within us! This is what God does! Praise God!

