

Union United Methodist Church

Sermon Outline: **Lent 5: "I am the resurrection and the life"**

March 25th, 2023. Pastor Michael Larbi

Readings: **Ezekiel:37:1-14; John 11:1-45**

1. New Life in Valley of Dry Bones: Ezekiel 37:1-14

- **Brief Background - A time of despair and hopelessness**

Ezekiel lived at a time when Israel defeated by the Babylonians, and many had been captured into captivity in Babylon. Ezekiel was a young priest who was also captured and sent into exile. The vision he describes in Ezekiel 37 is about the restoration of Israel by the Lord from the deep despair of captivity.

- **What the Dry Bones Represent**

"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.'** **12Therefore 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. **13And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 14I 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 37:11-14 NRSV

In times of despair and hopelessness, God's Spirit can give renewed life to the people of God.

- **The Important Role of Prophecy**

Requires Faith

It takes faith to do this:

1The 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. 2He

led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. **3He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know."**

We see a similar test of faith when Jesus questioned his disciples before the feeding of the 5,000 in John:

"3Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. 4Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 5When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" 6He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. 7Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." 8One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 9"Here is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" John 6:3-9 NRSV

Forms of Prophecy

Prophecy can be in two forms: **foretelling** and **forthtelling**. We see both forms here in this narrative.

- **Foretelling: what is going to happen**

4Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. **5Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 6I 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.**" Ezekiel 37:4-5 NRSV

- **Forthtelling - calling into being what should be.**

9Then 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.**" 10 I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. "

In the instructions to Ezekiel and how things play out in this vision, we get some great insights into how God works in our lives. As Jesus said,

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:24 NRSV

- God’s work is spiritual and the power of God we experience is spiritual activity that manifests in the natural
- The Spirit of God is the life giver.
- Words are important in bringing the power and Spirit of God into situations - hence the importance of prophesy.

2. **Jesus: The Resurrection and the Life**

The dialogue between Jesus and Martha is interesting:

21Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.”

23Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

24Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

25Jesus said to her, **“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”**

27She said to him, **“Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God,** the one coming into the world.”

38Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” **40Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed,**

you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, **"Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me."** 43 **When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"** 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. **Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."**

John 11:21-27, 38-44 NRSV

Here, we see that:

- Jesus prophesied to Martha what was going to happen (foretelling)
Note similarity to Ezekiel's first prophesy to the dry bones.
- Jesus prophesied to the dead Lazarus (forthtelling), calling him to come back to life. Note the similarity with Ezekiel's second prophesy.
- Jesus required faith of Martha
- Jesus only gave thanks - he didn't ask God to raise Lazarus from the dead at that moment - **"Father, I thank you for having heard me."**
- Lazarus was raised from the dead but Jesus had to tell people to "unbind him and let him go".

3. Resurrection Life through the Word

Jesus is the one who give us life.

The life we receive in Jesus is eternal and we are to live in it. However, we need to learn to activate the life of God in us but knowing what God says about us already and speak that constantly into our lives.

God is the God who calls into being things that do not exist. We are to be imitators of God. When situations arise, we are to know what the Word already says about us. We are to hold on to that and prophesy that to ourselves and into our situations.

Consider what Paul says about Abraham and how he succeeded in his faith walk with God:

16Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all 17(as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed—**God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did;** 18who, **contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be."** 19**And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. 20He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, 21and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. 22And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness."**

Romans 4:16-22 NKJV

Abraham demonstrated how to hold on to the promises of God.

He and Sarah obeyed God and had their names changed from Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah (father and mother of many nations) when they had no children. Every mention of these new names was a prophetic pronouncement. As Paul says, Abraham was full of faith, giving glory to God.