

"Can These Dry Bones Live?"

Ezekiel 37:1-14 and John 11:1-45

March 13, 2005

Great scriptures this morning - I love that first lesson with its valley of dry bones. - - - Can these dry bones live? Absolutely not! That is our typical reaction. Look out over any valley of dry bones look at any skeleton that has been parched by the sun, bones that have been picked clean and smoothed by the ravages of time and the elements and we would be quick to say that even the question itself is ridiculous. Of course dry bones can not live again! No further discussion is even necessary.

We are quick to make jokes about such things. It is always hard to know if any humor surrounding the issue of death is appropriate but it does make the point. I have read several times about three friends that were discussing death and one of them asked: "What would you like people to say about you at your funeral?" The first of the friends said: I would like them to say, he was a great humanitarian, who cared about his community. The second said that he hoped people would say that he was a great husband and father, who was an example for many to follow". The third person said, I would like them to say, "Look, he' s moving!!"

Or there was the letter that was reportedly sent by the Indiana Department of Social Services to a person who had been receiving assistance through their organization. The letter read as follows: ***"Your food stamps will be stopped in March because we received notice that you passed away. May God bless you. You may reapply if there is a change in your circumstances."***

Funny perhaps - and that is the point - we know that dry bones can not live. Dry bones do not come back to life. And there are so many dry bones all around us. Lives that have been parched by the heat and storms of life. Individuals that have been overwhelmed by the circumstances of life to the point that life has been stripped from their existence and all seems hopeless. Circumstances change - "HUH! It' s not going to happen" "Dry bones live again - no way!"

The prophet Ezekiel is taken in the spirit to a valley filled with dry bones "' dem bones, ' dem bones, ' dem ... dry bones". "Can these bones live?" he is asked. Being in the presence of God, Ezekiel answered by faith instead of sight or logic - "O Lord God, only you know!" How could he even said that. It is so obvious - of course such dry bones can not live. Still Ezekiel knew that in the presence of God anything can happen.

Can dry bones live? How often are we so very sure that the answer is no. And how often are we so very sure about that answer that we give up all hope. How often do we stumble along the cold hard road of life and find ourselves in a deep valley where everything around us seem devoid of life. In a valley full of dry bones we may not even ponder the

question long - ' Can these bones live?' - of course not. Living without hope is such a terrible way to live. Seeing dry bones and believing that there will never be life there again is such a horrible thing to have to live with.

Can these dry bones live? "O Lord, you know!" "Dem bones, ' dem bones, ' dem - dry bones, now hear the word of the Lord. The foot bone connected to the ankle bone, the ankle bone connected to the leg bone, the leg bone connected to the back bone" Well, you get the picture.

Jesus stood in front of the tomb of His friend Lazarus. Everyone knew that the situation was hopeless - everyone, that is, except Jesus. For some incredible reason, Jesus believed that dry bones could live again. Martha believed in the resurrection but that was sometime in the future. Dry bones could not live here and now. Jesus knew differently. In two weeks we will again proclaim the risen Jesus Christ and remind you that He was only the first fruits of resurrected life. In Christ there never needs to be any hopelessness when it comes to death and resurrection to eternal life.

But Ezekiel lived and prophesied some 600 years before Jesus came on the scene. 600 years before the birth of the hope that we know, Ezekiel stood in a valley of dry bones. Those dry bones were the people of Israel - dried out - without hope. It was not that they were literally dead. They had been exiled to a foreign land. They had been separated from their families and friends and taken from their homes. They had given up all hope. They believed that they would never again know the real life that they had know. But God had plans for those dried out lives that had lost all hope. God was going to fill them again with the breath of life.

Can these bones live? It so easy to say, ""NO!" - Can these bones live? "O Lord, you know!" "Do you believe in new life?" Well, maybe someday in the resurrection." No, Jesus says, Now! - Do you believe there can be new life now?

It was the Easter Sunday morning service in an East Texas church. The choir started its processional, singing "Up from the Grave He Arose" as they marched in perfect step down the center aisle to the front of the church. The last lady was wearing shoes with very slender heels. Without a thought for her fancy heels, she marched toward the grating that covered the hot air register in the middle of the aisle. Suddenly the heel of one shoe sank into a hole in the grate. In a flash she realized her predicament. Not wishing to hold up the whole processional, she slipped her foot out of her shoe and continued marching down the aisle. Most of the congregation did not notice a thing. The processional moved with clock-like precision. The first man after her spotted the situation and without losing a step, reached down and pulled up her shoe, but the entire grate came with it! Surprised, but still singing, the man kept on going down the aisle, holding in his hand the shoe with the grate attached. Everything still moved like clockwork. Still in tune and still in step, the next man in line stepped into the open register and disappeared from sight. The service took on a special meaning that Sunday, for just as the choir ended with "Alleluia! Christ arose!" a voice was heard coming up from below shouting... "I hope all of you are out of the way 'cause I'm coming out

now!" The little girl closest to the aisle shouted down the register, "Come on up, Jesus! We'll stay out of the way."

It is too easy to live in hopelessness when we see and feel dry bones all around us. But in the presence of God anything is possible - stay out of His way and watch as dry bones rise up again in the presence of and by the power of God.

AMEN