

## Can These Bones Live?

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Seeking: Lent 5 Ezekiel 37:1-14 and John 11:1-45

*The pervasive hope we have as Christians believes against all odds that God always brings life. Then we as Christian community are called to reach in and pull out those who languish in despair.*

Anyone feel a little hopeless these days? Yes.

Can these bones live? It's the question that folks in rural Mississippi are asking today after the terrible destruction of tornadoes that ripped through their communities on Friday night. When creation turns towards the extreme our fragile bodies often don't survive. There are those who are hurt. Those who have died and those who are left behind to try and pick up the broken pieces of their lives.

Can these bones live? At first, they will have energy to seek for the lost ones. They will have energy to pull apart the shattered sticks of wood to find those few precious belongings of their previous lives the wind didn't blow away. They will have energy to hug their neighbors and cry collective tears of grief.

Soon, though, the trauma will hit like a cement wall. Overcome with the enormous obstacle of having to sort through massive amounts of rubble, the depression of lost homes and lives will creep into their muscles and sinews. The days will become weeks and then months of not feeling like anything is normal...because it isn't.

Ezekiel's community had been warned for generations that if they didn't turn from idols to the living God they would be destroyed. Finally, it happened. The Babylonian army had come and deported large groups of citizens; God's people taken away to far off lands. God came to Ezekiel in Babylon and told him to prophecy to the people. Even though the Jerusalem temple had been destroyed, God wanted to live among them. God wanted to be at the center of their existence. God wanted them to know God was the Lord so they could have hope.

Thus, God says to Ezekiel in the middle of a valley of bones, God says, "Can these bones live?" As Rev. Shroyer writes, 'God doesn't ask if it's likely or if the forecast is promising. God doesn't ask for pie charts and percentages.' (Pg 39 Seeking. Lenten devotional. Sanctified Art.) 'God doesn't ask, "Do you know

how you're going to get out of this?" God asks: Can these bones live? It's a question not of probability, but possibility.' That's a statement of hope.

The answer is yes! Yes, these bones can live. Not by our power, but by God's power. The answer is yes! These bones can live. The answer is always yes! God is the God of new life. Hyacinths return to life each spring, their green leaves and fat buds rising out of snow damp earth. Babies born with ten tiny fingers and ten tiny toes. Jesus calling to Lazarus, "Come out!"

The question is not of probability, but possibility. The possibility that springs eternal with our eternally creating God, creating nothing out of nothing and calling forth life from death. We as Christians express each week the profound and pervasive hope we have in a radical God who knows the answer to the question before it is even asked of Ezekiel. Can these bones live? The answer is yes.

Read poem together

the answer is yes It's the question we ask at the end of our rope,  
when the storm is raging, when the monsters under the bed have introduced  
themselves.

When everything around us seems to be on fire.

It's the question we ask when hope slips through like sand in a bottle, when the  
mockingbirds stop singing, when the news reporter leads with another mass  
shooting.

It's the question we ask when the depression moves in, making herself at home,  
making a mess of it all. It's the question we ask when we're not sure if Easter will  
come.

Will it be Lent forever? Will the sun ever rise?

Will this hope lead to something? Can these bones ever live?

The answer was yes, from Martha when Jesus asked, "Do you believe this? Do  
you believe that I am the resurrection and the life and those who believe in me,  
though they die, will live? Do you believe this, Martha?"

Her answer was 'Yes, Lord. I believe that these bones can live. For you are the  
Messiah, the Son of God.'

And so Jesus commanded Lazarus to come out. The community reach into him,  
reached through the strips of cloth wrapped so tight and helped him come back to  
the living, come back to live. His bones lived.

This is what God calls us to do, my brothers and sisters. For there are communities all over the world who believe that dead is dead and life will never come again. Tornadoes, earthquakes, wars, terrorists all claim that death is the only way. For these of God's children, they need to hear that dead bones do rise again. That's our work, to unbind them and let them go.

God's children living in the cycle of poverty, in dead end relationships, those who cannot find work, those who believe that drugs and alcohol are the only things that can keep them alive. They need to hear that God is the God over life and death, that God can raise bones once more.

I asked you at the beginning of the sermon if you are feeling less hope. Now think of a time when God raised your bones to new life. Can these bones live? Yes. The answer is yes.