

## Thursday March 25 Ezekiel 37:1-14 – hope reborn

- 1 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.
- 2 He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.
- 3 He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.”
- 4 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 Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.
- 6 I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’ ”
- 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone.
- 8 I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.
- 9 Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’ ”
- 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.
- 11 Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’
- 12 Therefore prophecy and say to them: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel.
- 13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them.
- 14 I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’ ”

Yesterday we thought about HOPE and weeping by the rivers of Babylon, made into a hit record in 1978 by *Boney M.*

Another Old Testament passage from the same period was made into a song, written some 50 years earlier than that by James Weldon Johnson and his brother J. Rosamond Johnson, and first recorded by a group called The Famous Myers Jubilee Singers. It’s called ‘Dem Dry Bones’. You might recognise another prophet here, Ezekiel this time, with his vision in chapter 37 of a valley filled with dry bones.

In a vision God tells Ezekiel to command the bones to come back to life, which they do. The bones come together, joined by tendons, they’re covered in flesh, but there’s something missing. Then they stand up, but there’s still something missing, and they wail, “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.” Now we know what is missing: HOPE.

This passage isn’t about resurrection and going to heaven when you die. It’s about a nation that has undergone a disaster being restored. Yesterday we were thinking about God announcing to the exiles hanging on for dear life in a foreign land far away that they were going home. But as other parts of the Old Testament show, when they got back, things were tough. Read, for example, the book of Nehemiah, which Bishop David McClay is using his Lent talks in the Diocese of Down and Dromore. If

things were tough, and not at all what they'd been hoping for in their 'new normal', it's not difficult to hear them saying "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off."

To which to which you might expect God to say "Stop moaning! Pull yourselves together and get on with it!" But in Ezekiel chapter 37 God's words are not of rebuke but of promise: I'll open the graves you're still lying in, I'll bring you out and give you new HOPE. I wonder if there's some sort of parallel with what we're going through at the moment. If I'm right, two questions bubble to the surface that are worth pondering. The first is this: in what ways are we still pessimistic about the future? Perhaps being overwhelmed by the thought of all that money the government has borrowed in the past year being paid back: how on earth is that going to be possible without yet more hardship?

And here's the second question: if God is still in the business of restoring HOPE to peoples that have none left, what sort of difference would it make if we really 'do God' rather than ignore Him? But please forget about a bit more religion and a few eloquent prayers: it surely has to be something far deeper than that.