

Hope for the Living Dead

Liturgical Year A

Seeds of Hope

March 26, 2023

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Every two weeks, armed with checkbook, wallet, an empty bladder, and shopping list I head off for Wal Mart to do my grocery shopping. I usually depart from Wal Mart in a down mood, not because of the price for feeding my birds, cats and along with myself but because of the shoppers.

Today's shopping was no exception. I saw one woman holding her stomach as if she were going to drop a baby at any moment and she never once smiled or looked up. I saw a thin crippled man wearing a vet's cap and from time to time he would merely throw some food in the cart in front of him being pushed by an old worn-out looking WOMAN. There was the middle-aged man with leg problems who had difficulty leaving his cart bending to pick up cans of food. Never once did he look up to recognize other people trying to get past him.

In our Wal Marts, hospital waiting rooms, streets around town and in many of our churches people resemble the walking dead. Their enthusiasm for life resembles dead bones, zombies.

Before tackling today's scripture, I feel it incumbent to do a little education. Ezekiel was a prophet. It was never the prophet's task to sit in front of a crystal ball predicting the shape of things to come. My old friend Brueggemann reminds me time and time again that "a prophet is a person who interprets the times in which he lives." Walter encouraged all of us to stop looking for Jesus on every chapter in the Old Testament.

In Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament the term “nabi” simply means to call or to announce. It was the prophet’s central concern to remind Israel what it meant to be Israel.

Our prophet today, Ezekiel, “God is Strong” was one of the major prophets in the South. He lost his wife early in the exile. Ezekiel was one of the prophets taken into exile for twenty odd years following the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. Some refer to Ezekiel as the first fanatic in the Bible, maybe this is why I love him so much.

Ezekiel is a man of rich creativity and a versatile mind. Today we would call Ezekiel an odd ball, a ready candidate for the psychiatrist couch or a straight-jacket. At one time he cut off his hair and divided it into equal portions. Another time he carried his belongings out of his house through a hole in his wall.

He was very dogmatic, a stern zealot yet community minded. Ezekiel was not some passive bystander he was always one to take an active role.

You either liked Ezekiel or you wished he was dead. It was his task to inform those living in exile of their lost spiritual condition. The people in exile were moping around like people shopping in Wal-Mart. “OUR BONES ARE DEAD, OUR HOPE IS LOST, WE ARE CUT OFF.”

Now we come to the valley of dead bones. This is one beautiful, symbolic reading. Like too many of us with no vision the people in exile resembled a valley of dead bones and they saw no hope for any future. The book of Ezekiel is a sensory text, loaded with fantastic and bold imagery that appeals to all of our five senses.

The valley of dry bones is one story that deserves telling and re-telling. Ezekiel talks about the goodness of God minus the cheap grace and a cushy gospel of sweet love. The people have lost their five

senses or smell, sight, sound, smell, and. taste. The people lost hope of any kind of restoration. Their bleached, dried-up bones saw no hope, no life. The only thing left for them was rebellion. Those in exile and walking our streets today have difficulty with the promises of restoration from a loving God.

Sometimes at Wal-Mart I just want to scream out-loud announcing that life is real, that restoration is possible, that we are not alone. But I fear the truth would only get me locked up and sent to Mendota State Mental institution.

The prophetic imagination of Ezekiel should provoke us, nurture us to a new consciousness, a new way of looking at life. Appeal to our five senses and breathe in a new life.

Can't you SEE those dry bones within us and others? Can't you feel that new breath being offered to us? Can't you FEEL that new flesh growing on you? Can't you HEAR those bones rubbing against one another? Can't you SMELL the new life that is blooming around you?

As long as we keep blaming COVID for our poor church attendances we will dwell in the valley of dead bones. As long as we keep blaming how we were taught the Bible years ago we will dwell in the valley of dead bones. If you keep interpreting the Bible in an exclusive, tribal way you will dwell in the valley of the bones.

We need to take the diaper off the Bible and begin treating it as adult reading. Our bleached dry bones can come to life again, we can all be restored, renewed. The people in exile were revitalized. We too can come back to life.

We all need a kick to our bottoms where we can be restored, evoked to an alternative consciousness' where we see life and a future.

Winston Churchill planned his own funeral. Besides the many great hymns sung at his funeral the “Taps” was played, the universal signal that says the day is over. Following the playing of the “Taps” a bugler on the other side of the sanctuary played the notes of “Reveille” “It’s time to get up. It’s time to get up. It’s time to get up in the morning.”

Do we have the faith to get up and replace those dried up bones with bones covered with skin ready to go to work?

Dennis Siebert DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?

P.S. I offer a few of my many resources, to share them all would put me out of business.

Walter Brueggemann, Gerhard von Rad and B. Davie Napier