

Us Irish folks are very big into our story telling. We love to sit and tell yarns about things that have happened to us or those that we know. Everyone of us have a story to tell about our lives, with all of the twists & turns in it. Some stories have joy, some have sadness and hurt – that’s life. Every story that our Father God creates always bring hope when things appear hopeless. He brings life into everything. And this morning we are going to see that through the prophet Ezekiel.

Ezekiel lived amongst the Jewish exiles in Babylon. He lived in a settlement called Tel-abib, amongst 10,000 other Jews living there. To those that gathered there after the destruction of Jerusalem, their story would have been one of hopelessness. Before the exile to Babylon, the people lived for many years without God, everything was fine, they did what they wanted, they were confident in their own strength. But now they sit, far away from home, with no sense of a future, no idea of where to turn. Have you ever known of that sense of a hopeless situation – either for you or someone else you know? Well the prophet Ezekiel brings a message of hope.

The context of this reading is a place full of broken people. It’s not just that we hear about the brokenness and destruction of their spiritual home of Jerusalem. These dead bones that Ezekiel observes also represents the state of the people. They are defeated. They feel alone, they’re exhausted, they are as good as dead. And yet in the midst of that place of brokenness, there is hope. They had forgotten the promises of God, and yet God had not forgotten them. I wonder had they forgotten the words in the Torah which promised, “you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the Lord your God.”

And so God leads Ezekiel around the bones that are laid out across a valley. Verse 2 of our reading describes these bones as very dry, which suggests that there is absolutely no hope of life in them.

In verse 3, God asks Ezekiel, “Son of man, can these bones live?” Now it would be very natural to respond, “God there’s no way! These bones have been dead for many, many years. They will never live.” Or in our context, “God, no chance. I’ve been battling this illness, this pain, this memory, this addiction for years. I’ve tried everything and still it brings me to despair. I’ve given up on anything working”. And yet, Ezekiel doesn’t give up. He simply says, “Sovereign Lord, you alone know.” There was so much in that response from Ezekiel, as he himself was so aware of his helplessness in the face of death. Scripture says that His wife had died, and I’m guessing that the pain of such loss was still eating at him, and yet he had complete trust in the power of God. Look at how he addresses God – he calls out, “Sovereign Lord, you alone know.” “Sovereign” is addressed to someone who is in control of all things. The Sovereign Lord alone knows what is needed. He alone, can heal.

So where does hope and restoration come from? Well as I read this passage, I see the hope for all of us from verse 4. In verse 4 God directs Ezekiel to prophesy to these dry lifeless bones. The hopeless, broken, dead bones will respond to the Word of the Lord. Do you remember Jesus teaching his disciples when they were grumbling about his words to them, he said to them in John 6:63 “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I

have spoken to you – they are full of the Spirit and life”. So the Word of the Lord is a promise to cause breath to enter into these bones that they might come to life.

Without the Word of God being spoken to the dry bones, the dry bones would have remained lifeless. In the same way, in the New Testament reading assigned for this morning, Lazarus remains dead until the Word of God is spoken through the Son of God, when he addresses the grave and says, "Lazarus, come forth."

And so the results of the Word of God to these dry bones were startling. While Ezekiel was preaching, a rumbling or shaking started all over the valley. In the midst of the shaking or thundering the bones began to approach one another. God declared that he would put breath into these bodies and they would come to life. And so step by step as Ezekiel preached what God commanded of him, this massive graveyard of lifeless bodies came to life because “the breath” of the Spirit of God came into them. What a dramatic transformation - death to life.

One final point that brings real hope for me personally in this reading, is to know that no matter how hopeless a situation that we face, God will keep his promises. In verse 11, God moves from telling Ezekiel what to prophesy over these bones, to now explain to Ezekiel that these people – those in exile - have finally come recognising their real need of God. The exile has been painful, but the exile has brought people back to God. The people can see that they’ve let their bones dry up, that their hope is gone, and that they feel cut off; cut off from God.

But for the people of Ezekiel’s time, God put a new spirit in his people; restoration would come to a people who were dead. What a marvellous encouragement was this message of restoration to life. It encouraged both Ezekiel and the people in exile. As the prophet remained faithful to his call and proclaimed the Word of God, the ultimate outcome was a life-transforming experience that would result in a national resurrection. God remained faithful to his covenant. Today God remains faithful to his covenant over us in Jesus. The covenant is the promise of unconditional love and forgiveness and restoration based on the redemptive act of Jesus and His shed blood. Folks, our hope will always be found in him; he will never go back on his promises.

Remember that God never deals with dead things, he always is in the business of bringing life. We will celebrate the climax of this in a few weeks as we declare Christ is Risen, Alleluia!!

And so in that assurance, know in your own life of our Sovereign God who wants to step in and breathe new life into you today. Call on him, he will not leave you as an orphan, he will come alongside you and assure you of his comfort today.