

## ***Sermon***

### ***Consider the Possibilities***

Pastor Lisa Giacomazza

Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

March 26, 2023

Fewer parts of the Bible offer richer material for visualization and imagery than Ezekiel and the valley of the dry bones. This story is as close to a science fiction novel as you get. Where we are presented with something that is clearly dead, so much so, it is near to what our human minds would consider, irretrievable. Something that cannot be made new, something that will simply wither away and never regain the life it once had.

Life is filled with dry bones, isn't it? So many moments in my life I have been confronted with a valley of hopelessness, a time when what I had hoped for seemed impossible – that the time to achieve or become what I had hoped has past and now I have let it go and reimagine what might be next.

Perhaps as the scripture was read, you envisioned yourself walking with Ezekiel through your own valley. Maybe the dry bones represent how our bodies have changed over time, sometimes failing us. Maybe the dry bones represent a relationship that has changed or broken. Perhaps it's a struggle with addiction, mental health or our own spirituality. Or maybe it's grief over something or someone lost. Whatever you may have felt or envisioned, what we all must remember during these times of drought or deep grief, while you walk through your valley, can you feel God is present? Can you feel or sense that God is willing you to see this in a different way.

Scripture says, “Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel...I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live.” Such love in those words – such strength. God is willing the people to not give up their hope and to feel God’s presence within even their despair. God wills us too. This passage are words of restoration, inspiration and resurrection. How God can take what nearly has no life and restores life once again.

Our scripture passage from the Gospel of John is another tremendous account of Jesus’ ministry where he encounters as flesh something we all must grapple with on a far too frequent basis. The death of someone we love deeply. There is little in life that is more devastating than that. Even for we, who believe, knowing we must live without our loved one, is so difficult. Life changing in most cases. I myself have lost my grandparents, my parents and all my aunts and uncles. There have been other losses too. My husband has lost his parents and his brother all within just that last few years. When we are confronted with imminent death of a loved one, do we still not pray for a miracle, even for someone who is like the dry bones? Sometimes, though sometimes death is a welcome relief to pain and suffering. When they die, their pain ends but it tends just to be transferred to us in missing them. Jesus gets a taste of what it is like to be mortal and lose someone and to be amongst the grieving when someone dies. Martha confronts Jesus in her grief. Hear our passage from John 11: 1-45.

### **Read John 11: 1-45**

---

Inspired by Feasting on the Word, Year A commentary on John 11:1-45 by Veronice Miles, and Ezekiel 37: 1-14 by Katherine E. Amos.

As long as this passage is in the Bible, it essentially is the shortest. Jesus Wept. This verse serves as a truly authenticating mark of Jesus' humanity in John's Gospel. As Jesus and the disciples approach Mary and Martha's home, the tension between life and death intensifies and the immediacy of grief is overwhelming. Weeping and lament fill the air as family and friends gather to mourn Lazarus's demise and final sleep. The finality of death deepens the grief of Mary and Martha and their disappointment that Jesus has not arrived until now.

As we walk ever closer to the crucifixion this passage takes on new meaning. Resurrection, renewal – reviving community – all things we want to believe in, all things we hope for. But I wonder, do we lean too heavily on our own human understanding or are we able to truly feel God's presence within our valley of dry bones?

How many of you have ever witnessed a resurrection? Really? Ok let me ask a different way...How many of you watched Damar Hamlin on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, fall lifeless to the ground at the Bills game in Cincinnati? That was a resurrection. They happen at ECMC every day. Yes, modern medicine has a role, but if ask a doctor or nurse, they will tell you there is so much that is unexplained. Joe and I have been binge watching a show on one of the streaming services called, I Survived, from Beyond and Back. It is a show that has many different people share their death experience because all of them were dead and returned to life. They provide their version, their experience of what that felt like. Who they saw, what they saw, what they felt. It's very interesting and some it is pretty consistent with what we've learned through faith stories. Resurrection happens every day –

but which people get that chance is still up to God. How that happens, what their life looks like after that experience – is up to them to a certain extent – but it’s really up to God. Those who do not come back are not less fortunate necessarily – they are given mercy, grace. But releasing persons and communities from the clutches of death also demands something of us, as did Lazarus’s resurrection of his community. Though Jesus called Lazarus from the tomb, he urges those who were alive and well, “Unbind him, and let him go.” When we encounter people who are within transition in their lives, we sometimes want to offer our advice, our help, but in actuality, we need to recognize that God is present, walking with them, and to Let them go...into their own version of newness for them.

I had a poster that said, “Consider the possibilities... (dot, dot, dot) indicating that there is more to be said- this slogan proactively reminds us to dream beyond the boundaries, to consider the possibility of resurrection, with such profound hope as we stand at that moment, we stand in our valley or in the valley of our own community, listening for the voice of Jesus, ready to unbind us.

Consider the possibilities (dot, dot, dot) of your life, of your own renewal and resurrection. Stand in witness of the power of God to truly transform our city, our church, our own faith and our families. We stand at the edge of our own tomb at times – remember there is a time for weeping and there is a time of remove the grave clothes and to stand and walk toward the voice of God.

Who are you going to “be” this Lent? Do you witness to the Glory of God? Who are you going to “be”? Be a believer – as we walk through Palm Sunday next

week, then the crucifixion, Good Friday, then the glory of Easter. Who are you going to be? Consider the possibilities...

Amen