

“We Are Messengers of God’s Invigorating Love”

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Pastor James York

December 18, 2016

An invigorating message of transformed abundant life comes through the account of a person being a messenger of God’s redeeming grace to dry bones. After hearing the message of God’s love, they are filled with life.

Ezekiel 37:1-14 “The Lord took hold of me, and I was carried away by the Spirit of the Lord to a valley filled with bones. God led me all around among the bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground and were completely dried out. Then God asked me, “Son of man, can these bones become living people again?” “O Sovereign Lord,” I replied, “you alone know the answer to that.” Then God said to me, “Speak a prophetic message to these bones and say, ‘Dry bones, listen to the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’” So I spoke this message, just as God told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them. Then God said to me, “Speak a prophetic message to the winds, son of man. Speak a prophetic message and say, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so they may live again.’” So I spoke the message as God commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great multitude. Then God said to me, “Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, ‘We have become old, dry bones—all hope is gone. Our nation is finished.’ Therefore, prophesize to them and say, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I will open your graves of exile and cause you to rise again. Then I will bring you back to the land of Israel. When this happens, O my people, you will know that I am the Lord. I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live again and return home to your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done what I said. Yes, the Lord has spoken!’”

Every time life wears someone down to a point where they collapse in a heap, every ounce of their energy gone, everything lost you are called to be a messenger of God’s renewing love. Whenever you tell another about God’s love, you are a prophet, sharing a prophetic messenger.

Scripture proclaims today even if a group of people are slaughtered and their bones scattered in a mass grave, God will bring them back to life. God overcomes every form of death with life. Imagine the sound of Ezekiel’s voice speaking to the bones, his words reverberating off the mountains surrounding that valley and returning to his own ears, spurring him on. Imagine also the rattling of those bones as they slam into each other. The crashing cacophony of life resounds in that valley, and we hear it still in the rebirth that comes even in the valleys of our lives, echoing through the ages. It’s an amazing story of reversal—from a pile of dry and lifeless bones to a legion of living, breathing people.

Consider what it was like to be Ezekiel. To be asked by God to do something so outlandish. Prophets, that is people who are messengers of God’s love, are used to doing unreasonable things. But at least most folks have ears to listen. But this... this takes it to a whole different level. Be a messenger of God’s love to a valley of dry bones. And then proclaim God’s love to the wind. Imagine Ezekiel, there in that valley... hearing that otherworldly rattling going on as bones slammed into one another, catalyzed by your words. It must have been invigorating and thoroughly terrifying at the same time.

God is calling you, and me, to tell everyone who is fearful, hurting, broken, struggling, grieving, suffering that God’s love will renew them. Whenever another is distraught you are called to be a messenger of God’s resurrecting love. Sometimes we even need to tell ourselves. The psalmist sang to themselves. God restores my soul. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear for, God is with me.

“We Are Messengers of God’s Transforming Love”

Luke 1:46-55

Pastor James York

December 18, 2016

Clear your mind of the cards, art and pictures of Mary. Clear your mind of your own impressions of Mary. Create a new image as you listen to her song.

Luke 1:46-55 “Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For God took notice of God’s lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One is holy, and God has done great things for me. God shows mercy from generation to generation to all who reverence God. God’s mighty arm has done tremendous things! God has scattered the proud and haughty ones. God has brought down the powerful from their thrones and exalted the humble. God has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands. God has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. For God made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and Sarah and their children forever.”

This is not a sweet lullaby. It is a battle cry, bold and defiant. The powerful will be brought down, the lowly outcast exalted. It disperses the fear of the oppressed and fills the oppressor with fear. This is a protest song against every form of hate proclaiming that love will overcome. This is a protest song proclaiming that darkness will be dispersed by the dawn of redeeming grace. This is a protest song against every form of death proclaiming that life will overcome. It is a song that is reviving valleys of dry bones.

Mary’s song is a song of reversal, in the tradition of the old African-American spirituals and of protest songs. It is “We Shall Overcome”; it is “Where Have All the Flowers Gone.” It is a dissent against the way things are. It is a counter-testimony to the dysfunction that passes for normal in our world.

Mary sings this song, because her pregnancy itself is God’s act of dissent against corrupt worldly power. God did not choose a queen, a wealthy noblewoman on a high throne to bear the Messiah. God chose an unmarried peasant girl. God assessed the demands of the world and expectations of a king that would come in strength and might and prestige and said, “No, I’d just as soon not.” And in her song Mary echoes this divine No. No to the proud and their haughty ways. No to religious leaders who think they alone know the will of God and judge others. No to hate, fear and lies. No to hunger that goes unfed. No to dry bones, lifeless and still forever. God is with us to proclaim a resounding yes to life, love, joy, and peace for all. This is the tenacious longing we hear from Mary’s lips. Mary is filled with grateful joy as she carries Jesus enabling her to be a determined messenger of the transformation that is coming in Jesus. Mary sings for the weak and the lowly, the poor and the hungry. And there is a stubbornness to Mary. She sees the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. She sees power corrupting people with the desire to control others, as others struggle for the necessities of life. Mary sees the woe, misery and anguish around her. She sees valleys of dry bones all around her. And yet she sings. Mary sings of Jesus, God’s love made flesh, to right every wrong, wipe away every tear, heal every disease, make whole every brokenness, restore every loss, reconcile every strained relationship and perfect every imperfection. And Mary sings on through us. We join Mary in singing of the world that doesn’t yet exist but is coming. Mary’s song will go on and on until earth is as it is in heaven. Clear your throat, be bold, courageous and sing of God’s renewing extravagant love. Mary sings on through us.