

Dem Bones
Preached by
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For Reflection:

“How did we ever get mixed up with such a strange crowd? Are these people really our people? It’s like waking up and hanging out of an upstairs window in a Breughel painting.”

--Robert Raines

Hebrew Lesson: Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” ⁴Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.” ⁷So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. ¹¹Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ ¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, 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. ¹³And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act,” says the LORD.

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 12.10-20

¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the

sense of smell be? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many members, yet one body.

Meditation: *Dem Bones*

I thought, on this weekend when images of skeletons abound, it would be a good day to look at some of our scriptures where bones have large roles. While we may be inured by news reports, especially frequent in these last few weeks, of the discovery of human remains, we have been blessedly spared visuals. Nonetheless, the image of disarticulated bones rising, assembling, and forming into one company would have been pretty ghastly. It has lots of potential for a Halloween horror movie, because, of course, in such a movie, the skeletons would scatter to commit all kinds of terrifying crimes and, no doubt, snatch new members for the bony army. The movie would end with the bones again scattered through a field, the skulls smirking while waiting to be raised again. Such a movie would, however, have nothing to do with our text.

Our story tells not of the drafting of an army but of the revitalization of the body of the faithful. It's a story about new life for the people of God—one which revels in the power and will of God to make for himself a people and to empower that people to serve the world.

At the Lord's command, Ezekiel spoke the word of the Lord. Dry bones rattled, and leapt to their feet, clicking together, no doubt making Lego-like snapping sounds, or the sound of knuckles cracking or knees creaking, connecting one to another until once again, they were formed into the whole people of God.

If neat little snaps were the only sound of the body assembling, the only sound of the body getting organized, it would be a comfortable process.

The bones rattled, but once they were assembled, life continued to come, sinews and flesh appearing, softening the jostle of bone against bone. It's not until the end of the story that this reconstituted people receive their breath.

I suspect that fact, in addition to being a theological point that the breath of God comes last in creation, that animation comes after formation, there was also a practical concern for holding off the breath until last.

Snap. The sound of a body bumping up against its own hard edges. *Crack.* The sound of a body trying to sort out where all its many pieces go, not always fitting the puzzle pieces together right the first time. *Creak.*

If assembling that people of God was anything like assembling the people of God today, you know there would have been -- ah -- let's call it grumbling.

Snap. "Hey, wait a minute! That's my femur."

Crack. "No it's not. Look, it's the same length as the other one."

Creak. "When you were alive the first time, you had one short leg. Give it to me."

Snap. "Stop jabbing me with your pointy elbow! I'm trying to put my foot on."

Crack. "Whoa! Look at Zeke. He's got his patella on top of his cranium."

Creak. "Yeah, he always was a knee-jerk kind of guy."

Snap. "Hey! Just because you rushed ahead (and I think you forgot some metatarsals—you never were thorough), doesn't mean you get to stand in the front. I want to see what's going on too."

Snap. Crack. Creak.

Oh yes, if they got breath at the beginning, there would have been grumbling. I like this story

from Ezekiel. While God is clearly in command, powering the assembly, this story is realistic about the challenges of forming the people of God into an effective body of worship, praise, and service. There is just enough whimsy, just enough potential for getting it wrong as getting it right, just enough noise and complaining, just enough need for sorting out the pieces and trying them on for size, for humans called into being by the breath of God, not just as individuals, to be true to the efforts of forming the people of God.

Snap. Crack. Creak.

We can still hear the sounds of hard edges bumping one another, the muttering of those who think someone got something of theirs; of the ones who wished they had their first life back, instead of the new one in this time and place. The air is still filled with the random, clunks, clicks and occasional crunches of the seemingly haphazard assembly of Christ's body in the world. All too often it can seem like the hip bone wound up where the head bone is supposed to be, or that we have too many head bones and no feet or hand bones, and on and on it goes in the endless divisions of thought and faith and culture that the church has been vulnerable to its whole life long.

Snap. Crack. Creak.

In our congregation, we will be/we are hearing the clatter of the body of Christ assembling itself as God continues to call it into being. The Nominating Committee is seeking your input for the calling of new officers. If you don't want a hip bone where a head bone should be, make your suggestions. *Snap. Crack. Creak.* New head bones.

With the constant flux of people in the cycles of life and faith, coming and going, moving away, or coming here, aging or giving birth, we are changed day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year. *Snap. Crack. Creak.* The shifting of hand and foot bones.

Our ministry has not been reduced to bare bones by the pandemic, but it has been slimmed down. We have more pastoral ministry, classes and mission efforts in the upcoming week than we have had since the original lockdown. *Snap. Crack. Creak.* God is breathing new life into us, even now.

We will be constantly working to find new ways of doing things, and we'll try some pieces where they don't fit, before we find ways for them to *snap, crack, creak* into place. A restored body, newly fitted for ministry.

It's easy to focus on the odd noises; to feel the uncomfortable *snap* of bones coming together in new ways, to hear the grumbling or be the grumbler, when someone else is the bone we want to be, or the wrong bone is in the socket; or to be witness to the confusion of the body being assembled in ways we have never seen before.

It's easy to focus on the discomforts. Therefore, it is important to remember that the body does not assemble itself; it is called into being by God. It's important to remember that the empowering imagination for the constant creation and recreation of the body of Christ in the world is God's. It's important to remember that after the bones are organized, then come the sinews and the flesh, and the re-animation of our life together, not by our power, but by the power of God. It's important to remember that the sounds mark our movement toward God's vision for life and wholeness. They are not the groaning of arthritic bone grinding against another in failing joints. God is ever and always moving us beyond the failures of this body and this life, adding sinew and flesh, giving breath to the new life that awaits us.

So let us listen and watch for the sights and sounds of birth that come anew each day. When we hear the *snap, crack* and *creak*, when we hear the grumbling or are the grumbler, remember those are the sounds that assure us new life is on the way. If we get frustrated at the pace with which new life is

arriving, (too fast or too slow), let it go. If we get discouraged because we can't see how the whole thing fits together, trust in God. Let's throw our hearts and souls open to the life-giving breath of God in these days.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

God of compassion and hope: In this hour, we especially remember you who always remembers your people in this and every place. As we seek to find new rhythms of life for this season, let us look to you to set the pace and point the way. May our worship of you be a constant in weeks of change.

With violence, including domestic violence, seeming to be ever on the rise, we grieve with those who have lost loved ones. We have compassion for those whom war requires to raise their children alone, those parents who have had the unnatural duty of standing at a child's grave. We grieve with children who grow up with only a memory or no memory at all of parents—and for parents who cannot give their families the safety and stability which is every one's dream.

Glorious God: in our remembering, we dare to ask for your help in the true honoring of such loss and sacrifice. By your Spirit, grant us the courage to step into those homes where life has been land-mined by violence. Help us to welcome single mothers and fathers into our church and our homes to nurture children other than those in our own households and to ever remember our own responsibilities to a wider world. And above all, grant us the commitment and awareness of the ways we can be partners in peacemaking, so that one day as you have promised, the day shall dawn when swords are turned into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, when mourning shall turn to dancing and the nations shall not make war any more. We pray in the name of the Lord of love and the Prince of Peace who taught us to pray together...

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day, our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts
as we forgive our debtors
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil,
for thine is the kingdom and the power
and the glory forever. Amen.**