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**Series: Our series of Online Worship**  
**Sermon: Can These Bones Live?**

**SCRIPTURE ~ Ezekiel 37:1-14**

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know."

Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.' "

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.' " So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.' "

**Sermon**

It was in the Miocene Epoch, 16 million years ago, that this area was cascaded over by volcanic basalt time and time again, stretching over much of Washington and Oregon. Eruption after eruption layered this new land with sheets of rock. At the same time, the earth was also cooling, and the glaciers were beginning to form. The ice age pulled so much water from the ocean that the coast was farther out than is today - you'd have to drive another 40 miles out to see the ocean. And after millions of years, the ice started melting. Many of you know of the Missoula Floods that came through here just under 100,000 years ago, off and on, on and off. Carving the gorge, flooding this area 400 feet in depth as water raced to the ocean, 80 miles per hour, more water than all of the current rivers of the world now carry. 40-60 times these floods cascaded over this basin over tens of thousands of years. This ever changing landscape, this fertile Willamette Valley is a very recent creation. And it will be different in another 50,000 years - whether by human caused climate change or just the geological shifts that occur, it will not look the same.

We are celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day. This amazing planet. And the question that has been

asked for a generation is can this earth heal from humankind's pollution and constant strain on the natural world? We never wish for a Pandemic, but this shelter at home has revealed interesting climate conclusions. In some cities in China, citizens are seeing blue skies for the first time in decades. One scientist actually claims that the cleaner air has saved over 70,000 lives in China in just these two months alone. You can actually hear birds chirping and coming back. People can breathe. Satellite imagery over urban centers across the globe are seeing the air quality heal to levels not seen in generations. In Venice, fish and dolphins are returning to the canals, and the clarity of the water has returned. Animals are returning to Yosemite National Park. A silver lining to the horrible crisis we face is that we can see what the Earth could become again, if we figure out how to change our lifestyles. And here we are, just waiting for the next big shift of what's next, for if history ever tells us something, it's that tomorrow will be different than today - even in geological time.

Last week, we read the words of Jeremiah, who gave the people hope that the upcoming Babylonian Exile was not the end of the nation. Babylon came, and wiped out the country, taking the nation into captivity to Babylon, present day Baghdad. The promised land is no longer promised - it belonged to another nation. And this is where Ezekiel fits in. Ezekiel, as a priest, was one of 20,000 people that were dragged to Babylon to live a new life. They were not kept in prison, but they had to change their daily life, their customs, their holidays, their language, anything that resembled their old way of life. Jerusalem was destroyed. No temple. No palace. No hope. Large numbers died from starvation and disease. This was the death of the nation. Everything that they had worked for as a country, was gone. Everything that they identified with home, was destroyed. Their history, their culture, their title of "God's chosen people" had been destroyed with the annihilation that followed. Everything - gone. Everything - stripped away from you. Do you remember the movies that came out in the 1980's about what would happen to us if another country took over the United States? Movies like "America", "Red Dawn", "the day after". Do you remember how these movies affected us? They terrified us, they showed us how lucky we are to live in this country we would almost rather not live if such a tragedy occurred, if our national identity and culture was crushed and destroyed. That was what happened to Ezekiel. Everything that he had held dear and everything that he was familiar with had vanished. Even his own wife did not live. This man was alone, this man had nothing, this man was in utter, complete ruin, without the woman nor the country that he once loved.

It is at this point in Ezekiel's journey that we read this morning's scripture. Ezekiel, a man without anything and stripped of all that gave him life before was led by the Spirit into a mass graveyard, a place of death. "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry." And then the Lord has the audacity to ask Ezekiel "Son of man, can these bones live?" "Can these bones live?" What kind of question is that? How cold and how harsh is God's inquiry! God has allowed everything to be plundered, stolen, raped, and killed, and then asks the prophet: Can these bones live? If I were Ezekiel, I wouldn't have the presence of mind to stop myself from telling God a thing or two about what I think about the whole situation, let alone anything about dragging me into this valley of bones! But Ezekiel says the only thing he can believe "Only you know, Lord". And God tells Ezekiel, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them "Dry bones, come together and form a body". And Ezekiel does. And then the Lord says to Ezekiel, "Prophecy to the breath and say to the breath "Give these bones life". And Ezekiel does. And the bones came together and muscle was added, tendons appeared, skin grew around the ligaments and the breath of life came into their bodies and they stood there, alive, a vast army of once lifeless bones. And the Lord explained all of this to Ezekiel: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophecy and say to them: This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I am the Lord."

This story from the Old testament, this story of utter ruin and chaos to a promised future, a promised hope, is a metaphor that I can draw on as we grapple with this generational event. When can we get back to normal life? When can we mourn the hundreds of thousands who have died? We can't even have funerals now.

What we are experiencing with all of this is grief. Loss of freedom of movement. Loss of opportunities to go out and about, to visit family and friends. Loss of baseball and basketball, and God forbid this fall, football. Loss of income. Loss of jobs. Loss in our 401K that makes it look like a 201K. Loss of life.

Ezekial was there. He had gone through loss. And the Lord asked him, at the bottom of his gloom and doom, can these bones live.

And it's a question to us. Can our bones live? Will we get through this? And we know the answer. The answer is yes. But it takes time. First there was a rattling. Then bones came to bone. Sinew came to sinew. It didn't happen all at once. It was not a snap of the fingers, but over the course of time Ezekiel saw dry bones come together to create a vast multitude. It's beyond what we read this morning, but the Lord told Ezekiel, "I am going to open your graves, I will bring you back to the Land of Israel. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil."

Do you believe it? Do you believe that this national, neigh, global nightmare will someday be over? Yes, it will. But it takes time. It may not feel like in now, but tomorrow is going to be different than today. It might move at the undetectable speed of glaciers, or come roaring down like flood waters, but everything changes. And we need to change with it. Can these bones live? Can our mental and emotional health live? Can our environment and natural world live? Yes. It's just that we're in Exile now. But the Lord says, I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live. And the family of God said, AMEN.