

Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church April 6, 2014
Rev. Bob Undercuffler Newark, Delaware

Ezekiel 37:1-14
John 11:1-45

**“When It Comes to Living,
All Things are Possible”**

Dem bones, dem bones gonna rise again.
Dem bone, dem bones gonna rise again.
Dem bones, dem bones gonna rise again.
Yes, hear the word of the Lord.

I've sung that spiritual many times ...
Both seriously and for fun.
With college and seminary choir.
In Vacation Bible School
Riding in the car with family joining-in
and in the shower.

But I have seldom preached on this scripture .
To tell you the truth, I have **often** preached
on this scripture...If not on this particular
scripture, then on this theme.
On the reality of life.
On the possibilities of life.
OF LIVING.
All life a gift from God.

**And when It comes to living,
all things are possible”**

Have you ever been worn down and worn out?
Beaten and battered?
Frazzled -- Disheartened -- Depressed.
Spirit squeezed from you.
Have you ever felt your feet encased in
concrete?
Hope drained?

Ezekiel was writing to people who had lost the best
they ever had. They were uprooted and driven into
exile. (no, nobody drove them ... they had to walk.
From Jerusalem to Babylon is 500 miles as the crow

flies. Close to twice that over the caravan routes)
 Their Jerusalem homes destroyed...their city laid
 waste ... their temple in ruins.

Carrying or dragging whatever they could
 manage that was all in their past.

And their present in Babylon? They were living in
 exile. Strangers in a foreign land. And starting over
 from scratch. Among people who had no regard for
 their cherished practices ... their worship of the Lord
 God. "What has your God done for you lately," they
 jeered.

One of their devoted poets sang

"By the waters of Babylon, we sat down and
 wept when we remembered Zion ... when we
 remembered our hometown and our hometown
 ways. There, our captors demanded of us
 songs.

They mocked us ... sing us some of the
 songs of Zion. But how can I sing the
 songs of Zion in a strange land? Indeed,
 how sing any song in a
 strange/ foreign/hostile land?

And so I ask, Is there any word of hope for such
 dispirited, disheartened people?

**Are all things possible when it comes to life?
 To living.**

Ezekiel had this vision. Can a vision bring some relief?
 I wonder.

Or is Ezekiel a little off kilter? Weird? Written-
 off as crazy?

Jeanne read the vision. I'll reprise the highlights. God
 set me down in the middle of a valley; it was filled with
 bones. God led me all around them. There were
 many bones lying in the valley, and they were all very,
 very dry. God said to me, "Mortal, can these bones
 live?"

"Yes Lord...You know they can live."

(But can we be so certain?)

And God said, “speak to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin.

So I spoke for the Lord as I was commanded; and as I spoke there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone...and there were sinews on them ... and flesh ... and skin covered them.

But there was no breath in them. And I said to the breath ... ”The Lord God beckons ... come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live.”

And the winds came, and breathed upon the bones, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

And the Lord God said ... “O mortal ... these bones are the whole house of Israel. That is, these are bones of our whole beloved faith family. And our ancestors.

For us, the whole house of Israel includes Presbyterians, and Methodists and Baptists and Roman Catholics and a whole line of people who claim the faith of our fathers and mothers...and struggle to keep faith, hope and love alive. Many who are familiar are scattered in the bone pile.

FAMILIAR BONES, like those who reverence the Temple ... rather than the spirit of God who flows-out from the Temple and waters and freshens all the spirit touches.

FAMILIAR BONES, like those who reverence the Law ... rather than the spirit of God who requires “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and your neighbor as you love yourself.”

FAMILIAR BONES, like those rooted in past customs and so find it impossible to be lifted on eagles' wings by fresh winds of Holy Spirit.

FAMILIAR BONES, such as those so afraid of the future ... fearful of losing the little they have, so adamantly opposed to new things ... new approaches that just may be faithful, and just ... and gateways to engaging more people into God's wide-open family of faith.

Yes, those bones are dried up and hope is lost, we are cut off completely.

BUT NOW LISTEN TO THE LORD GOD ... I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves. Dry bones no more, but rather bone to bone, with sinew and flesh and muscle. **ALIVE.**

And I am going to bring you back home.

I will put my spirit within you and you shall live.

And you shall know that I am the Lord your God.

NEW LIFE ... VIBRANT LIFE ...

IT'S A GIFT FROM A SOVEREIGN GOD!

AND GOD REVELS IN CREATING.

GOD EXALTS IN DOING NEW THINGS.

TRUST THE STUNNING POWER OF THE

GOD OF LIFE WHO GIVES LIFE

ABUNDANTLY.

EVEN IN VALLEYS OF DRY BONES.

Yes, when it comes to living, all things are possible. That's the God we worship.

BUT NOW LET'S MOVE INTO THE NEW TESTAMENT AND WATCH MORE DEAD, DRY BONES LEAP INTO ACTION.

Jesus had received word from Mary and Martha that their brother ... and Jesus' dear friend, Lazarus was ill. Jesus lingered for two days before he left to see Lazarus.

Mary was out to meet Jesus and when she saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother Lazarus would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

When It Comes to Living, All Things are Possible.

The Jewish mourners expected nothing more than a funeral service.

They are irritated that Jesus did nothing to prevent Lazarus's dying.

At the tomb Martha worries about opening the grave because of the smell of a body dead for four days.

No one understands. No one expects that life can come out of a tomb.

No one grasps that Jesus is the life-giving power of God.

BUT JESUS PERSISTS. He declares ... "I am the resurrection and the life." The dynamic life of the age to come is no longer a future expectation, but a present reality.

"Those who believe in me, even though they die, they will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."

To be united with Jesus means to be a recipient of eternal life. The unheard-of claim of God's renewing power is then acted on. LAZARUS ... COME OUT!

And amid the symbols of death – such as ... intense grief,

 a skeptical and impatient audience,

 the odor of a decaying body,

 the tightly wrapped grave cloths ---

in the midst of all that JESUS SPEAKS AND ACTS ...
AND THERE IS LIFE.

It's a little surprising that the biblical text indicates little rejoicing at the resurrection of Lazarus.

 Yes, some of the people believed in Jesus because of the incident,

 but others ... in the verses that follow ...

feeling threatened by Jesus awesome power to give life, go to the religious authorities who begin to set in motion a

plot to crucify him. And so the story of giving life then leads to the story of a hideous death on a cross. But that's for another day.

For now ... and for then too ... when it comes to living, all things are possible.