

Sermon Text for August 21, 2022

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Psalm 30:11-12 and Ezekiel 37:1-14 *“From bones to dancing”*

If you have been coming consistently to church you will have noticed a theme that we have been following as we preach from our 9 month Bible Challenge. The story over these past few weeks has gone the following. We are in the midst of the time of the nation of Israel during the prophets so 5 or 600 hundred years before Jesus and they are in the worst time historically of this people's history. They have been taken into captivity into Babylon, they have watched their loved ones die at the hands of their captors. Their capital city, Jerusalem, has been under siege and in the midst of the hunger and starvation the people are doing atrocious things that they never imagined that they would have done, like boiling and eating their own children to stave off starvation.

But we have seen over these weeks that even in these most desperate of times God has provided a promise of hope and restoration. For example last week we were reminded in Scripture of the faithfulness of God even in the midst of the bleakest times. When we are the most afraid, we saw, it is the result of us being the furthest from God because even as we face the bleakest most difficult of times we can do it without fear because God's faithfulness has been seen over and over and over again and we simply need to be reminded of it.

This week life is promised after this time of death, what we see described as after a time of dry bones. This life, we are told, is able to turn these bones to dancing in a life that is abundant and full and not just lived and played out. Life is given to us by God and that is a constant throughout Scripture. That life, that full life for you and me, can only be given to us by God and found in our Savior Jesus Christ. Interestingly, as we have found ourselves pretty consistently in the Old Testament lately we haven't really talked much about Jesus, today we do, we simply have to. Let's read.

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We find ourselves in Psalm 30 which is a very different Scripture from what we have seen lately. Lately we have seen laments describing how the author has been up against the wall and is beseeching God to save him. Here, instead, it is a psalm of praise and celebration marking, look at the preamble again, the dedication of the temple. This would be in the time of King Solomon, at the height of the nation of Israel where their territory was extended as far as it had ever been in history, King Solomon was respected all over the world for his wisdom even as

far as Egypt and beyond. Things were going well, so well, in fact, that God commanded the son of David, this Solomon, to build his temple so that worship and praise and sacrifices could take place the way that they were supposed to take place.

Every single facet of the nation of Israel was at its height. Politically it had never been more unified and stronger. The families were united, the religious life was booming and significant with the building of the temple. There was purpose and safety and meaning in all that the people did. But they could remember a time when it wasn't always like that. So in the present things were going great and they were able to say, as we read in vs.11-12, that God has already turned their mourning from the past, into dancing. This has happened. He has taken the sackcloth that was used for mourning and turned it into joy. This isn't a promise for the future, the people were living in it here and now and a celebration was taking place because the temple of the Lord had been built.

You see, as an aside, there is Scripture that tells us that when we build the house of the Lord, or when we as a congregation do something significant that will bring us closer to God in this place, you do something about it, you dance, you have an organ dedication, you do something to proclaim the currently joy of Christ that you are experiencing here and now. As the Psalmist states he was in the reality that he was able to say that he would give thanks to God forever. Surely right now he was feeling it and he couldn't imagine what it would be like to not give thanks to God. That is Psalm 30. The transition had already taken place from mourning to dancing, from sackcloth to joy.

This doesn't necessarily reflect the times in which we are living. On one level we do find ourselves as one of the most powerful nations in the world both politically and economically. That is the truth and the person who is our president is considered the most powerful person in the world. At the same time while we continue to enjoy the status of a hegemonic power that we have had since the 1950's, since pretty much all of us can remember, we are a nation divided, but we have been there before. The economy is not as strong as we would like it to be, but we have been there before as well.

If nothing else it feels to us like we are closer to the mourning as a people than we are to the dancing. But I also sense that most of us feel as if we are coming out of this time of trial that we have been experiencing. When I read the Ezekiel verses to session and to our staff this past week I remarked that it does feel like, at least here at the church and it is also reflective of much of society, feels as if we are coming out of a dark and difficult time as opposed to getting deeper

into it. Certainly Ezekiel reflects not a time that we find in Psalms, but maybe a time that is closer to what we are currently experiencing now ourselves.

This is probably the best known Scripture in all of Ezekiel. It is called the valley of the dry bones and it is one that is used for Pentecost or other times of the year. We find verses 1-10 gives us this metaphor of the prophet being taken to a valley of dry bones and then in vs.11-14 we find the explanation of the metaphor to the prophet and to us as well.

The current state of Israel in this Scripture is one with which we are very familiar. It was one of dry bones. We have gone over this in the past Sundays. Israel was enslaved and it was taken into captivity in a far away land called Babylon. Let's be clear, that is a stark difference from the time in which we are finding ourselves as a nation. It may be a difficult time but we are still the most powerful and the most economically stable and resourceful nation on the earth. So we can't take that metaphor too far thinking that we are suffering as the people of Israel were suffering in this Scripture. We simply are not. We have not been taken from our homes, our cities destroyed, and serving as slaves in a foreign country. Israel was in this Scripture, we are not today.

Verses 1-10 have God take the prophet to this valley and he shows him dry bones and they represent, as we see in vs.11 the people of Israel who say that they have lost hope. This valley is full of bones representing the death and the mourning and the seismic shift in culture and society as a result of that event of the exile. Not only was there a literal mourning for the people who had been killed and ravaged in the long lonely march from Israel to Babylon, but culturally the people had lost so much as well.

Without a doubt the history books as it describes the years of 2020-2022 will describe it as a seismic shift within the body of the people and the culture of the United States. We are living through a time where historical markers will be set and rewritten in light of what we have been through. We didn't just survive the pandemic but we witnessed and were a part of a very deep and significant cultural shift that has impacted all elements of society: families have been affected, churches have been affected, government, schools, financial institutions. Each of these sectors of society, and more, have been changed because of the time in which we are living.

This, at least, is a similarity that we share with Ezekiel, even as we still find ourselves within a nation that is powerful and in many ways able to call its own shots in relationship to the world. As we come out of this time in our history as a nation and as a people, we are able to claim the promises that Ezekiel gives to the people of Israel which is a promise of life. He tells

the Ezekiel in vs.12 and 13 that the graves will be open, and there is no greater promise of life than that those who die will come back to life. This gives us an opportunity to talk about a time when that actually happened.

When you go to Matthew 27:52 you catch a taste of what it will be like when we are resurrected. At the death of Jesus, when he conquered death himself, the graves were opened and the dead walked up on the earth. We read in Ezekiel that God will give life and not just an existence to each of us. If you feel as if you are just existing and not living your life, that is not what God wants for you. When we read in Genesis 7 that God created us it wasn't enough, he gave us life as well. He doesn't want us just to be a pile of bones, he wants us dancing, living life to the fullest. We really haven't been able to do that over these past years.

10 times in these verses in Ezekiel we read the Hebrew word Ruach. This term means wind, breath, spirit. The spirit of God came up on the bones and knit them together and also gave them life. In this Scripture we read that God will bring life, but things will be different. In vs.14 we read that I will put my spirit in you and you shall live. He goes on and says I will put you back where you belong. In Psalm 30 we read, you have turned my mourning to dancing. You have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.

Over these past years some have tried to do it on their own, break out into a way of life that demands what they consider to be theirs by privilege. What we find stated here is that life can only be given to us by God. He takes the initiative, and we follow. The point is that the Spirit, the will to live, the purpose for which to live comes from the Lord and from the Lord alone. We can't just want something to be different and hope it happens and when it doesn't then take things into our own hands against the will of God. The Lord has to make it happen.

All of these promises that we find listed here are realized in Jesus. Jesus' life, and death, and resurrection have provided us life not in a theoretical way, but literally. We have life because Christ gave us his life. We will remain in mourning and divided if we do not live in Christ. Because we will keep trying to figure things out on our own initiative without the Ruach breathing life into us and guiding us towards life. Amen.