

Fear felt like dry bones. Maybe you felt worn out and tired exhausted uncertain about where the energy will come from.

Maybe you're feeling like that right now. Sometimes

the season of Christmas can be one in which we lose the excitement and the happiness and the joy. And we end up feeling. Worn out.

And tired.

And exhausted. Do you feel like the. I think sometimes our congregation can feel like that.

Sometimes we find ourselves feeling like dry bones.

We want to make a difference in our community. We want to reach out to others. Invite them to know Jesus to worship grow give serve and share. And yet we find ourselves at times like those dry bones that he's Aqeel saw in the valley. In the book of zeal this. Valley of dry bones is one of the most terrifying and awe inspiring images in scripture. This encounter with God shows that there can be hope in some of the most hopeless situations. Gus people have been driven into exile and were dispersed throughout the land is Ethiopia a prophet of God found himself living in exile under a weakening Assyrian Empire. In Chapter 37 that you heard just a moment ago we find that Ziek deal was caught up in some kind of spiritual state. He was in the very presence of God is equal 37 1 to the Lord's power overcame me and while I was in the Lord's Spirit he led me out and set me down in the middle of a certain valley.

It was full of bones. He led me through them all around and I saw that there were a great many of them on the valley floor and they were very dry.

To Ezekiel the scattered bones represented the people of God had been scattered and they'd been divided. They'd been set apart from what bring them life. They found themselves a lifeless.

Imagine that scene of valley filled with bones. It's really a gruesome image. What happened here. Who are these people. What did they do to deserve death.

Sometimes when I read this passage of scripture I can't help but remember the pictures of genocide that you've seen from the World Wars from Rwanda from other places in the world where people are put to death and senseless and violent ways. These kinds of images can fill our hearts with fear and darkness and hopelessness.

And yet if we keep reading the valley of bones is not a vision of death.

It's not a vision that says there's no hope left for you. And even if we consider that these bones are and are a metaphor for the people of God if perhaps they might be considered to be a metaphor for the church we find.

That there is still hope. A United Methodist colleague says often has been known to say this that that god does God's best work. In cemeteries.

Even when we think death or downward spiral is imminent even when we can see no signs of life we can rest assured that God is at work. We can rest assured that even if we are feeling dry and lifeless as individuals or as a family or as a congregation or maybe even as a community that God is still at work.

As the verse continues in Ezekiel God asks a profound and prophetic question. God asks me human one can these bones live again. I said Lord God only you know.

He's equal gazing out of the bones could have easily said Ed. No it's not going to happen these bones are clearly dead. No way. God. He could have also easily said a self-righteous Well of course they can live again. Instead he says. Lord God only you know. Only you know.

Maybe he was skirting the question or or maybe in the face of such overwhelming despair he felt the only sensible response was to put responsibility back into God's hands if these bones were going to live it would be because of God and the power of God's Spirit.

And sometimes I think we might find ourselves asking that same question here at the church.

Can these bones live.

Actually our questions are phrased a little bit differently. But what will we do without paid musical staff here in a few months.

What will we do if the furnace blows. Can we ever get anyone to be able to make sure that everyone in every seat can hear well in this space. Will our worship attendance begin to grow again. Can we continue to invite and connect young families. Can these bones live.

We want to experience new life but we don't always know how. Sometimes we buy into the lie that a flurry of activity will make us feel alive especially perhaps at this time of year. Have you been busy these past weeks. And yet activity is what not really what brings us life. The things that we can do but they may not feel like new life. As we look into our future. I hope that we are able to reply as his equal did. Lord God only you. Know. The crazy thing about his vision was that God didn't let him off the hook.

Even though Ezekiel's reply was based on a sound understanding of God on sound theology. God wanted him to participate in the work. Hear these words as Ezekiel continues.

God said to me prophesied over these bones and say to them dry bones hear the Lord's word the Lord God proclaims to these bones. I'm about to put breath in you and you will live again. I will put sinews on you placed flesh on you and covered you with skin. When I couldn't breath in you and you come to life you will know that I in the Lord.

God said to me prophesied over these bones speak words of life over them give them words of encouragement that will help them live into whatever is to come. Words are powerful friends.

God ask Ezekiel to use his words.

Sometimes I want God. Perhaps Ezekiel was thinking I want God to do something amazing and miraculous but just do it without me. God I don't really want to have to speak up. I don't really want to

have to offer my gifts or my blood or my sweat or my tears. Can you just do that great thing without me. I love to come along for the ride. I'd love to be a part of that. But can you just do it. I just want to watch. I just want to be along for the ride.

But God doesn't let you off the hook. He says you are the one that needs to prophesy over these bows he tells him what to say but you are the one to speak these words. His words are powerful.

We are not off the hook either. Solomon in all his wisdom declared this in Proverbs Chapter 18 verse 21. Death and Life are in the power of the tongue.

Those who love it will eat its fruit. Death death and life. Are In The Power.

Of the tongue. Have you ever been in a conversation where some the words that people are using. Brings darkness.

And pain. And division and death. What's that like. If you ever spoken those words.

Have you ever been on a conversation work where words bring light and life and joy and hope.

What's that.

Have you spoken those words. There is power in the words that we use gods had prophesied over these bones. Use your words easy Aqeel.

Too often we underestimate the power of our words in the church and I'm not talking about the words that we use in this space during this time on Sunday morning. I'm talking about the words we use in the parking lot. An online post in casual conversations around town. The words that we use communicate a vision or a lack of vision of what we believe to be true about ourselves and our congregation. Death and life are in the power of the tongue. New Life takes hold when we talk about ourselves in encouraging and helpful ways new life began to take place in this valley of dry bones. When sequal spoke words over them prophesied words from God. And here's the thing.

It's not just preachers who are called to be as equals.

Everyone has the power to speak. New life over dead bones. Everyone has the power to speak. New life over dead bones is what else is true.

Sometimes we have a vision problem. We have a picture that is our job to fix things to make it happen to lead. And instead what what is true is is that gift is for each one of us.

Not one particular person not a set of people not not those with particular gifts but with all of us. God has not called us to do all of this by ourselves. God has called us to speak words of life and encouragement of hope and light to one another to our community.

So that when we begin to believe that God has given us gifts that need to be shared with the community and the world. That is when new life happens and resurrected life happens. Zeke heal. When confronted with dead bones had a choice.

He could choose to believe what he saw what appeared to be true or he could obey God and speak a word of encouragement a word of life over bones that were already dead. Why did they choose new life.

Versus seven and eight. I prophesied just as I was commanded. There was a great noise as I was prophesied. Then a great quaking in the bones came together bone by bone. When I looked suddenly there were sinews on them the flesh appeared and then they were covered with skin.

But there was still no breath in them. God has given us all the privilege of standing in the valley standing in our community standing among our congregation standing in our family and when we see darkness and death what do we see things don't go in us they might go. We had the chance to speak life in them. And see where there is darkness and death beginning to see light and life to see those bones come together to form bodies. And

yet there is one thing yet missing. Bodies aren't yet.

Alive.

Versus nine and ten God said to me prophesied to the breath. This is God's breath prophesied human ones say to the breath the Lord God proclaims calm from the four winds breath breathe into these dead bodies and let them live. I prophesied just as he commanded me when that breath entered them they came to life and stood on their feet. An extraordinarily large company. The dead bones that lived through the very breath. Of God. When we try to do things that God doesn't want us to do what we end up is tired and cranky and worn out. But when we engage the community in the way that God is calling us to we experience life to the power of the Holy Spirit. And this is part of the message of this. Season.

That Jesus is the very word of God. Spoken over you and me spoken over this congregation and this community but not just us.

As for the whole world when Jesus came to live among us this is God's very word calm to live among us. Not because we're all that now because we haven't put together or deserve it but because we don't. Have it All put together.

Because we don't deserve it because Jesus came that we might have life.

Jesus came the words might be spoken over us that we might share these words with others that bring life and life and hope and joy and peace. Christmas reminds us the truth that God in the flesh arrives in our neighborhood and becomes one of us.

A retired school teacher an oilfield worker a ranch hand a lawyer a plumber. No matter where we live or what we do. God sees the dry bones.

In us because for each one of us somewhere there are some parts that need to be brought back to life. There's some deadness in each of us. God knows that we need a new life.

And the good news of Christmas is that God offers us new life in Jesus. What would happen if we like Ezekiel began speaking prophetic and encouraging words over ourselves over our congregation over our community. What is the word of God that came to live among us. Jesus Christ what if you share that very same word with others that others might come to hear this word of life.

And light. What a rattling sound there would be bones coming together. Life coming where there wasn't life anymore where people might give their lives to Jesus Kingdom work throughout our communities.

So let's let God use all of what we have.

Our gifts our talents our resources to change our community to change our congregation and to change the world. We need God's Spirit breathe into us.

Breathe into our congregation. And today we celebrate the coming. Of Christ. It's a perfect time to start these dry bones Liffe with God's help.

Of course we pray with me. Oh god we confess that times we find dryness and darkness and parts that. Don't have as much life as they used to or as we'd like them to so God we ask that you would come and fill us up.

Breathe into us in our congregation in our community among our family and our friends. Send that your breath. Send your word. Send Jesus.

And help us to receive him. We must share with others this good word. This good news your name we pray amen.