

We turn this week to the prophet Ezekiel, who was a priest and prophet in ancient Judah, a contemporary of Jeremiah during the time of the Exile. But while the later remain in Judah, Ezekiel was among the elite taken from Jerusalem, who walked an ancient 900 mile trail of tears to captivity in Babylon in the First Exile 597 BCE. He prophesied judgement of Judah from then up until and through the 2<sup>nd</sup> exile in 587 BCE, when the Babylonian Empire destroyed both Jerusalem and the Temple. Towards the end of his prophetic book he shifts to begin talking of a new hope, as we see in today's text.

*The hand of the Lord came upon me | by the spirit of the Lord* : The language tells us that this is not a literal reading, but a vision, a metaphorical experience of a truth God is communicating to the prophet.

**bones**: the language of being bone is used repeatedly in biblical poetry for lament. See Psalm 6:2 "Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror"; Psalm 22:14 "all my bones are out of joint", Psalm 31:10 "my bones waste away"; Psalm 102:3 "my bones burn like a furnace." In the Exile, lamentation was used to express their belief that they are cut off from God, or that God has cut them off. Here this dramatic, easily imagined vision of bones being transformed would speak directly to this common metaphor for loss, despair and lamentation.

**ALL AROUND THEM** : the Hebrew used is "sabib sabib" meaning : "around (and) around" or thoroughly. Imagine the macabre scene of walking around and around among the bones.

**PROPHECY**: The vision happens in three moments. The resurrection of the dead bones isn't complete until the third time. It calls to mind the healing of the blind man in Mark 8:22-25 in which the man's eyes are opened, but a second healing touch from Jesus is required before the man's vision is whole. There is more happening then just a returning to how things used to be.

<sup>22</sup> [Jesus and his disciples] came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. <sup>23</sup> He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?" <sup>24</sup> And the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking." <sup>25</sup> Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

Here the first prophetic resurrection (verse 7) is incomplete without the ruach of God, the dead are more zombie-like than living images of God. The second (verse 10) transforms the decomposed corpses, not just resuscitating the dead. The third (verses 12-14), speaks of the way in which the whole people shall be resurrected, not merely returned to their homeland from their captivity in exile; they shall return not to make Israel great again, but to be something wholly new and different.

## SCRIPTURES FOR SUNDAY 12.10.2017

### Ezekiel 37:1-14

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> *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.* <sup>2</sup> He led me **ALL AROUND THEM**; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. <sup>3</sup> He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." <sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, "**PROPHECY** to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." <sup>5</sup> Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause **breath** to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup> I 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."

<sup>7</sup> So 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. <sup>8</sup> I 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. <sup>9</sup> Then 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." <sup>10</sup> I prophesied as he commanded me, and the **breath** came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a **vast multitude**.

<sup>11</sup> Then 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.' <sup>12</sup> Therefore **PROPHECY**, 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. <sup>13</sup> And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O **my people**. <sup>14</sup> I will put my

**breath:** the Hebrew word רוּחַ [ruach] can also mean, wind or spirit (as seen in Genesis 1:1-2 “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind [ruach] from God swept over the face of the waters.” The language suggests a direct connection between breath and God’s Spirit.

**a vast multitude:** the Hebrew construction in this phrase is quite emphatic: gadol me’od me’od, “very, very large”.

**my people:** It is of special note, then, that God claims these exiles in this third, climactic sermon, calling them “my people” twice (verses 12-13). God is fond of repetition in this last sermon: the Lord promises to open their graves twice and promises to raise them from those same graves twice more. And, should this emphasis-via-repetition not suffice, be unclear, or otherwise appear somehow incomplete, like the lifeless valley of reconstituted zombies in the vision, the final verse clarifies the breath that has been mentioned so often in this passage.

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.”

### Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

- What shimmers for you in these passages?
- What word, phrase or image touches your life today?
- What do you find hopeful?; hard to believe?
- How do you hear this vision speaking to you in your life’s journey?; to us as a church in a post-Christian world in which the Church is struggling to grow, maintain and/or find its way?
- How does this story bring you hope in the season of Advent: the coming of Christ?

The Related Gospel Reading includes a famous citation of Jesus talking about resurrection found in John 11:1-27 [53]

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” <sup>4</sup> But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” <sup>5</sup> Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, <sup>6</sup> after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

<sup>7</sup> Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” <sup>8</sup> The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” <sup>9</sup> Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. <sup>10</sup> But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” <sup>11</sup> After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” <sup>12</sup> The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” <sup>13</sup> Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. <sup>14</sup> Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup> For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” <sup>16</sup> Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

<sup>17</sup> When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, <sup>19</sup> and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. <sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” <sup>24</sup> Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” <sup>27</sup> She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”