“DRY BONES, RATTLE!”
Easter
2022
Ezekiel 37:1-4; Luke 24: 5-6b

INTRODUCTION

WHY DO YOU LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD? HE IS NOT HERE; HE HAS RISEN!

ON THIS EASTER, I AM BEING TOTALLY, ABSOLUTELY AND UTTERLY SELFISH. I DECIDED TO PREACH ON MY SINGULAR FAVORITE CHAPTER IN ALL THE BIBLE. EZEKIEL 37. I AM HOPEING THAT, AS WE CELEBRATE THE RISEN AND LIVING LORD, WE WILL COME TO SEE THAT WHAT HAPPENS IN A VALLEY FULL OF DRY BONES IS A HARBINGER OF WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN ON EASTER MORNING.

MY THEME IS SIMPLE. IT ISN’T ORIGINAL. IT IS THE TITLE OF A SONG THAT COMES FROM ELEVATION WORSHIP – THAT’S A CHURCH – OUT OF NORTH CAROLINA. THOSE OF YOU WHO LISTEN TO CONTEMPORARY MUSIC, I WOULD IMAGINE, HAVE HEARD THE SONG: “DRY BONES, RATTLE!”

ON THIS EASTER SUNDAY, COME WITH ME THAN, TO A GRAVE-YARD. LET’S LOOK AT THE CONTEXT.

1 EZEKIEL IS DRAWN TO A VALLEY FULL OF BONES

THE PROPHET, EZEKIEL, IS IN EXILE WITH HIS FELLOW ISRAELITES. THIS IS ABOUT 600 YEARS BEFORE THE SAVIOUR IS BORN. THEY ARE ABOUT 700 MILES FROM HOME IN A DESERT COUNTRY – BABYLONIA – ENCAMPED AS REFUGEES ALONGSIDE A SLUGGISH STREA CALLED KEBAR. THEY ARE CUT OFF FROM THEIR TEMPLE, THEIR FAMILIES, THEIR FARMS, THEIR RELATIVES, THEIR FRIENDS, THEIR WAY OF LIFE. THEY ARE IN THE DARKEST DESPAIR. THEY CANNOT SEE ANY LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TEMPLE.

DO YOU KNOW WHO ELSE WOULD BE IN DESPAIR? THE APOSTLES OF JESUS IN THAT UPPER ROOM, BEHIND CLOSED DOORS – AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION OF THE MESSIAH. JESUS IS DEAD. DEAD AND BURIED. DEAD AND GONE. JESUS MIGHT AS WELL BE IN A VALLEY OF FULL BONES. ON FRIDAY HE WAS BRUATALIZED, TERRORIZED, CRUCIFIED. THE DISCIPLES ARE LOST. WHAT ARE THEY GOING TO KNOW? HE SAID HE WAS GOING TO RISE, BUT HOW IN HEAVEN OR ON EARTH IS THAT POSSIBLE? THE DESPAIR WE SEE HERE WITH EZEKIEL AND WITH THE APOSTLES BEHIND CLOSED LAND LOCKED DOORS – REST ASSURED THE SHUTTERS ARE SHUT- THE CURTAINS DRAWN- THIS DESPAIR REMINDS OF A SAMUEL BECKETT PLAY I ONCE READ ABOUT.

SAMUEL BECKETT WAS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE GREATEST PLAYWRITES OF HIS TIME. THE PLAY IS FROM 1952 AND IS TITLED, WAITING FOR GUDOH. I’VE MENTIONED THIS BEFORE.

IN WAITING FOR GUDOH, BECKETT PRESENTS THE STORY OF TWO TRAMPS WHO ARE WAITING FOR GUDOH. THEY’RE WAITING AND BELIEVING A LIE. IN THE PLAY, BECKETT TEACHES US THE ONLY HERIOC GESTURE IN LIFE IS TO EMBRACE DESPAIR – AND TO REALIZE THAT WAITING IS ALL THE REALITY THAT IS TO BE FOUND IN GUDOH.

YOU SEE, GUDOH NEVER COMES. IN THE PLAY, GUDOH REPRESENTS GOD AND GOD’S GRACE, AND HE NEVER SHOWS. THIS IS WHAT THE ISRAELITS IN CAPTIVITY THINK. THIS IS WHAT THE DISCIPLES FEAR – JESUS MADE A PROMISE THAT HE SIMPLY WILL NOT BE ABLE TO KEEP.

LET’S GO TO BONE VALLEY. THE HAND OF THE LORD IS ON THIS YOUNG PROPHET – HE’S ALL OF ABOUT 25 YEARS OLD. HE IS LED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD INTO THIS VALLEY OF FULL BONES. OH – NOT JUST ON THE FRINGE OF THE VALLEY. NOT JUST ALONGSIDE THE VALLEY. NOT TO SOME PLAEETEU OVERLOOKING THE VALLEY. HE IS PLOPPED BY

SON OF MAN, CAN THESE BONES LIVE? THE OBVIOUS ANSWER IS THAT THEY CANNOT LIVE. ALL VESTIGES OF LIFE HAVE LONG SINCE BEEN BLEACHED OUT THEM. WE READ, “THE BONES WERE VERY DRY.” HOW CAN THESE BONES EVER RATTLE AGAIN? THE RESPONSE FROM THIS PROPHET IS TRULY STRIKING!


SON OF MAN, CAN THESE BONES LIVE?

EZEKIEL LIVES WITH PEOPLE WHO FEEL CUT OFF FROM THE LIVING FOUNTAINS OF FAITH, FEELING HOPELESS. THINKING “GUDOH” IS NEVER GOING TO COME…NEVER GOING TO FORGIVE…NEVER GOING TO EMANCIPATED. THEIR SIN HAS BEEN TOO GREAT.

IS THERE ANYTHING WORSE THAN A SENSE OF HOPELESSNESS? ANYTHING WORSE THAN MEANING RUNNING OUT OF YOUR LIFE AND KNOWING THAT TOMORROW YOU’LL FEEL EMPTIER THAN TODAY? TO FEEL THAT YOU HAVE BEEN ABANDONED BY FRIENDS OR FAMILY, HUSBAND OR WIFE, THAT THERE WILL NEVER BE ANYONE WHO CAN REPLACE WHAT HAS BEEN CENTRAL AND IMPORTANT TO YOU? TO BE INVADED BY THE DEVASTATING DOUBT THAT GOD IS NO LONGER THERE, THAT THERE IS NO PROOF OF HIS EXISTENCE AND NO EVIDENCE OF HIS LOVE? WELCOME TO ALIENS ALONG THE KEBAR IN BABYLON, WELCOME TO THE UPPER ROOM AFTER JESUS IS CRUCIFIED.

LISTEN TO THE LAMENT OF THESE FOREIGNERS – PRISONERS – IN A FOREIGN LAND: OUR BONES ARE DRIED UP; OUR HOPE IS GONE, THERE’S NOTHING LEFT FOR US. “THERE’S NOTHING LEFT FOR US?” DO YOU THINK THAT SAGEMENT FALLS FROM THE LIPS OF PETER…OF JOHN…JAMES…NATHANIEL…THOMAS…IN THAT UPPER ROOM? BONES DRIED UP! JESUS IS DEAD. HOPE GONE. HE IS NOT COMING BACK. TOMB SEALED. THERE IS NOTHING LEFT FOR US!” HOW OFTEN HASN’T THAT STATEMENT FALLEN FROM YOUR LIPS WHEN IT SEEMS AS IF GOD IS NEVER GOING TO COME? “THERE’S NOTHING LEFT FOR US.”

II OUR OWN BONE VALLEY

THE STORY DOESN’T END IN BONE VALLEY. IT DOESN’T END WITH A DEAD CORPSE ON A CROSS. GOD GIVES THE PROPHET A COMMAND: “PREACH!” PREACH WHAT? THE WORD OF GOD. TO WHOM? THE BONES! “DRY BONES, HEAR THE WORD OF GOD!” THOSE ARE YOUR BONES IN THE VALLEY. BONES BLEACHED DRY…BLEACHED DRY BY A HARSH WORD. BLEACHED DRY BY UNWARRENTED CRITICISM. BLEACHED DRY BY ABUSE, THE INDIFFERENCE OF OTHERS. BLEACHED BY SOMEONE’S MALICE; A DIVORCE, A DISEASE. BLEACHED DRY BY OUR OWN SIN. “SON OF MAN, CAN THESE BONES LIVE?” “SON OF MAN,
CAN MY BONES LIVE?” THE ANSWER OF EASTER IS “YES!” “OH, YES THEY CAN!”

HE PREACHES THE WORD AND DRY BONE RATTLE! THERE WAS A NOISE, A RATTLING SOUND, AND BONES CAME TOGETHER, BONE TO BONE. NOT JUST DRY BONES RATTLING, BUT FLESH AND TENDONS AND SINEW AND SKIN APPEAR ON THESE BONES! BUT THEY HAD NO BREATH. ON THE CROSS JESUS WOULD BREATHE HIS LAST BREATH AND GIVE UP HIS SPIRIT.

IN SUCH A POWERFUL WAY, LIFE IS STILL DEFINED BY BREATH. DOCTOR’S STILL Scribe ON THEIR CHARTS, “SUCH AND SUCH OR SO AND SO, EXPIRED ON SUCH AND SUCH DAY AT SUCH AND SUCH A TIME. THE WORD, “EXPIRE,” MEANS TO BREATHE OUT AND NOT BREATHE BACK IN! THE OPPOSITE OF EXPIRE IS INSPIRE! BREATHE IN! THE WORD THE PROPHET PREACHES IS GOD BREATHED! AND SO THE PROPHET CONTINUES TO PREACH.


THIS IS THE PROMISE GIVEN: I AM GOING TO OPEN YOUR GRAVES AND BRING YOU UP FROM THEM; I WILL BRING YOU BACK TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL.

THIS IS NOT THE ONLY GRAVE-YARD WHERE THAT SPIRIT FROM THE WINDS – THIS SPEAKS TO THE SPIRIT’S POWER AND MAJESTY; THAT MIGHTY AS AN EAGLE SPIRIT SHOWS UP TO DO SOME GRAVE-BUSTING! PRIOR TO THOSE TWO ANGELS SHOWING UP TO OFFER UP THEIR OWN QUESTION: “WHY DO YOU LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD?” THE HOLY SPIRIT SHOWED UP! AND WHAT DID HE DO? HE BREATHED THE VERY BREATH OF LIFE BACK INTO THE LUNGS OF JESUS! DRY BONES RATTLE! OH, HOW THEY RATTLED ON THAT EASTER MORN! FOR YOU – FOR ME – FOR ALL WHO BELIEVE THOSE DRY BONES RATTLE! WHAT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE TO MAN IS MORE THAN POSSIBLE WITH GOD!

SAMUEL BECKETT CAN HAVE HIS PLAY! OUR GOD SHOW! HE SHOWS IN HIS WORD! HE SHOWS IN A PIECE OF BREAD AND TASTE OF WINE! HE SHOWS IN THE SIMPLE WATERS OF BAPTISM WHERE THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS BECOMES THE CRUCIFIXION! WHERE THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IS THE RESURRECTION OF ME! HE SHOWS FOR THIS PURPOSE! THERE IS THAT MAJESTIC REFRAIN, SPOKEN BY THE PROPHET, THAT SPEAKS TO THE PURPOSE OF IT ALL! LISTEN TO WHAT YAHWEH SAYS…

YOU ARE GOING TO COME TO LIFE – SO THAT YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM GOD. THERE IS GOING TO BE RESURRECTION IN A VALLEY FULL OF VERY DRY BONES... I AM GOING TO LEAD YOU HOME...TEMPLE REBUILT, WORSHIP RENEWED...LAND OF ISRAEL RESTORED – THEN YOU, MY PEOPLE, WILL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD, I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT IN YOU AND YOU WILL LIVE – DRY BONES ARE GOING TO RATTLE, RATTLE, RATTLE – THAT YOU WILL KNOW THAT I THE LORD HAVE SPOKEN – THAT I HAVE DONE IT – MY SON IS GOING TO COME FROM THAT GRAVE, OUT OF THAT TOMB, BUST OPEN THAT FAULT SO THAT YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD – THAT I HAVE DONE IT, DECLARES THE LORD!

SON OF MAN, CAN THESE BONES LIVE? I SAID SOVEREIGN LORD, YOU ALONE KNOW! WHAT A VISION! WHAT A VALLEY! WHAT A PROMISE! WHAT A SAVIOR! WHAT CERTAINTY FOR YOU! DRY BONES RATTLE! RATTLE THEY
DID! RATTLE THEY WILL! FOR YOU – FOR ME! RATTLE THEY WILL! AMEN!