

Hope In Despair
Ezekiel 37:1-14
March 26, 2023
Pastor John Klawiter, Preaching

Grace and peace to you my siblings in Christ,

The visuals of today's reading pivot away from the gospel told in John to an Old Testament story. Long before Jesus walked the earth.

Ezekiel is providing a vision to the people of God that they will spring forth. This misery and drudgery won't last forever.

And no, he's not talking about a Minnesota winter.

His people are down-trodden. Beaten up. They're in exiled. Not everyone has survived, but those that remain feel like a pile of dry bones, left for dead in the wilderness.

It's in this moment that Ezekiel is given a vision of the future.

Retired St Olaf professor Maggie Odell says, **"If the dry bones represent the living exiles, then, it turns out that the entire vision is concerned, not with the reality of death, but with despair. The exiles were the survivors, yet they have dug their graves with their fear of God's absence. To this hopelessness Ezekiel offers a startlingly simple metaphor of divine presence, the ready availability of breath.**

Breath. The *ruach*.

Breath matters. When someone says, "take a deep breath," what are they saying?

Stop. Think about what your body does naturally, on its own, and slow down.

Ezekiel is essentially telling this to an entire people. God will provide the breath. We will get through this. Together.

Displaced peoples are part of history. Today is no different.

How many refugees are there around the world?

At least 89.3 million people around the world have been forced to flee their homes.

**Among them are nearly 27.1 million refugees,
around half of whom are under the age of 18.**

The Bible is full of stories about the mandate to care for refugees.

Faith, with the leadership of Nancy Mollner, passed out yard signs a few years ago in response to helping with refugees with the note:

“Love Thy Neighbor, No Exceptions”

Our long history of walking with refugees as a congregation has created many cross-cultural ministry opportunities.

Most of us can trace our lineage to the United States from immigrants and refugees. New settlers who faced an uncertain welcome when arriving to this country. Our ancestors didn't all have it easy when they arrived.

Many came to the United States in search of religious freedom.

What this land provided was a promise of hope.

Our story relies on the courage and strength of previous generations to trust in God to provide a new home.

Here we are. We are NOT the dry bones. We are more like the realization of that hope—the harvest or bloom—the outcome of Ezekiel's words.

Ezekiel's vision of a valley of dry bones is a place of promise within the book. The prophet is brought to a valley, a low place filled with bones. In this vision, these dry bones represent the people in exile. They feel like dry, hopeless, weary people in a foreign land. But God does not leave them as dry bones!

This church has countless leaders that have stepped up when asked to walk alongside new refugees that arrive in our community and state.

These new settlers are weary and face many new challenges in adapting to this place.

Nancy Mollner, who watched the Syrian crisis on the tv, was compelled to formally begin a process for our congregation to help new arrivals to the United States.

That refugee support has meant providing supplies for many new families since 2017. As Nancy will tell you in a few moments, there is a current ask for help.

Then, in 2021, we were approached by Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota to say yes to their invitation to be a circle of welcome congregation.

About 10 volunteers formed a circle of welcome team and waited to find out who they'd walk with and where they were from.

In early 2022, that call came in. A family from Afghanistan; we had to move quickly.

Sandy Zarembinski led the team in our interactions with this family that settled in Minneapolis. One of those volunteers, Rochelle Sosnoski, will tell you about what that experience was like.

Nancy and Rochelle are voices of hope to a people that are weary and afraid. Here's what they have to say about the various ways we provide refugee support.

VIDEO

Ezekiel's vision is a promise of new life. Like a sunflower that starts as a small seed and grows to become a beautiful flower, our faith helps us grow in transformational ways.

I've seen that a lot of that growth this Lent. By members exploring their **spiritual gifts, advocating** for refugees or unsheltered neighbors, helping **look for crosses** as a reminder of God's love for us, or just breathing intentionally to nourish our lungs for the day ahead... God is providing the breath.

This prayer from our Lenten devotional materials and is our encouragement to trust in God. In all things. In all times:

Healing God, I could use your help today. There are things that I carry, things that I wrestle with, things that bring a heaviness to my life. If you can, offer healing. Bind yourself to the broken parts of me. Call me by name. Heal what hurts. With hope I wait, amen. *Prayer by Rev. Sarah Speed*
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We don't have to wait much longer... Good Friday is coming, but so is resurrection. That hope is what gives us breath today. Amen.