**Prophet Margins Week 4**

**Opening Prayer**

**Background**

 Today, we will be examining the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel had been exiled to Babylon after the Babylonians defeated the Judahites in the 2nd of 3 battles. The first battle in 605 made Judah a puppet state but they were allowed to stay put. However, they rebelled and were defeated again in 597. This is when some, including Ezekiel, were exiled to Babylon.

Ezekiel was a priest, or at least he would have been, but was taken into exile before he served in this role. His career as a prophet began on his 30th birthday when he would have started his priestly duties and ended around 20 years later when he would have ended his priestly duties; priests normally served from ages 30-50 in the first temple period (960-586 BC). For the first half of Ezekiel’s career and his book, he spoke of the coming downfall of Jerusalem, which happened in 586 BC. Let’s pause for a moment and picture ourselves in the place of the Judahites. Their world had ended. Everything that could go wrong did go wrong. Their land was in ruins, Jerusalem, their great city, was leveled, their temple was destroyed, and now they were in a strange land, a thousand miles from home. For us, this would be like someone sending us to live in the middle of the Arctic. Not only would we be a long way from home, but we would have to figure out a new way to live and survive. That was where the Judahites were when we hear the words Ezekiel is about to speak to them. For you see, in the second half of his book, Ezekiel speaks of the renewal of all things. This renewal would start with the Judahites, then move to other people and nations of the world, and finish with all of creation being renewed.

**Questions**: How have you experienced loss? How did you deal with it?

**Read Ezekiel 37:1-6**

**Questions:** Where did God take Ezekiel for this vision, and what was in this place? What does God ask Ezekiel? What does God tell Ezekiel to prophesy/say over the items in the valley? What do you make of this?

(One of the visions that God gives to Ezekiel in his renewal section is that of the valley of dry bones. God brings Ezekiel to this valley, where it is obvious that death and destruction have taken place, with the amount of bones being very numerous and the nature of the bones being very dry. God asks Ezekiel if the bones could live again, to which the prophet rightly says that the Lord knows if such is possible or not. These types of questions may seem odd to us, but they help the story move along and help the reader, along with the prophet, to consider the possibility of the bones being renewed. God then tells Ezekiel to speak to the bones as if they were listening. ‘For’, the Lord says, ‘I am the God of these bones’. God is the God of all that was, is, and will ever be, including this valley of dry bones. Ezekiel is to tell the bones that the breath of God will enter them, which will cause them to come back to life. Not only will they come back to life as mere skeletons, but they will also get their muscle mass back and be covered in skin so that their bones will be renewed as humans once again. From death will come new life and dry bones will be renewed into people. This is a replay of the creation of humanity from Genesis 2 when God formed humans from the dirt and breathed life into them. Here, God takes dry bones, breathes life back into them, and life returns to them. God is showing the Judahites that renewal will come to them, and exile won’t always be for them. So too, new life will come from the death that occurred. Spiritual and physical life will be had both while they are in exile and when they return to the Holy Land.)

**Read Ezekiel 37:7-14**

**Questions:** What happened when Ezekiel spoke to the bones? Why do you think breath is so powerful in this passage? What does God say to Ezekiel after the bones come to life?

 (Ezekiel speaks to the bones, and they start to rattle as they come together to form skeletons that are standing upright. Then, muscle and sinew started to cover the bones, followed by skin covering the muscles. However, as Ezekiel notes, renewal hasn’t fully come as breath had not yet been breathed into the people. God tells Ezekiel to speak to the breath of life, and ask it ot come into the people so that life will be fully renewed in them. Without breath, nothing lives. When babies are born, the first sign of life is them taking their first breath, and when someone dies, the last thing they do is exhale their final breath. When resurrection comes, when renewal comes, it will not be complete until a person breathes once again. God then speaks to Ezekiel about what all this means for the people of God. Hope seems lost like the valley of dry bones, cut off from the Holy Land, and all that was once good. But, not all is lost, the Lord says, for God will bring them out of their graves, like the renewed people in the vision. One day, the exiled people of Judah would return to the Holy Land, but this time they would have not only physical breath but one day would have spiritual breath. The former, the return to the Holy Land by the people thenceforth known as the Jewish people, came some 50 years after Ezekiel spoke of such, with Persia taking over Babylonia in 539 BC. The latter, spiritual breath, is a reference to the Holy Spirit, as the same word for breath also means spirit. Meaning one day the people of God would be given the Holy Spirit, which came about 600 years after this prophecy on the day of Pentecost.)

Prayer Requests

