

These are very interesting times, aren't they? People are losing their jobs, people are getting sick, people are isolating themselves, so they don't get others sick – very interesting times indeed. Sometimes, we accidentally hurt each other in times like today – our stress levels are high, we are worried about so many things – so I would ask that each of you take this into account. If I have hurt you somehow, I apologise – I did not intend to. If you feel hurt by someone, please take it with a grain of salt and forgive them. Let us keep our grievances with each other starved of oxygen, while we feed the spirit of grace and love: the holy spirit.

This isn't the first time that we, or our ancestors, have been through this however. My Mum taught her children to re-use everything and minimize waste at all times. She would take the wrappings the bars of margarine came in, and use them to line her cake pans. She would re-use wrapping paper and Christmas cards. She would wash and re-use bags, cloth or plastic, until they were impossible to re-use. She walked everywhere. Whatever didn't get eaten at a meal would show up somehow in a following meal. (Chicken soup with raisin-carrot salad in it). My Mum lived through the great depression of the 1930's.

Throughout history, humanity has had to face times of depression. One such time was during the life of the prophet Ezekiel. Israel and Judah have been overwhelmed, conquered by the Babylonians. Many people are now in exile, many are now dead, and many are starving. God spoke through Ezekiel, and shared many strange visions. One of them was the valley of bones. There's a song based on this reading that was popular a few years ago:

*Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones
Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones
Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones
Don't you hear the word of the Lord?*

In the time of Ezekiel, the people were dead, spiritually. They had no source of life or vitality, no strategies for renewal, they couldn't see a path forward. They said: 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' They saw no hope in the future.

And then came Ezekiel who announced: "Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live."

For Ezekiel, the presence of God was an almost material reality. Being with God was an awesome and overwhelming experience. The Temple, which had been destroyed, was carefully designed to filter the holiness of God, *to make it safe*. Otherwise it was like cuddling up to a nuclear reactor or going to bed with the sun itself or a black hole or something likewise mind-bogglingly powerful and potentially destructive.

The Israelites mishandled God's holiness. They had become cavalier, careless: they had taken God for granted. They imagined that God existed for their benefit. God was reduced to slogans like "God loves you." Or "God is my co-pilot." Or "Oh My God!" The Lord's name had become a trivial swearword: "Jesus Christ!" They were no longer in awe of God and God's total capability to do whatever God wanted. They were no longer prepared for God to be holy and free – rather, God was theirs to control and manipulate, to satisfy their own wants and desires. They would decide what God was like, and what God would do – or even if there *was* a God.

The people of Israel had become blind in their idolatry of themselves. Only God is God. God is beyond our control. God is holy. In fact, Ezekiel notes that God resurrects His people from death *because He is holy and needs to act in His holy way* – not because of anything that His people have done! It is for His own name, His reputation, *His integrity* that God resurrects His people: no other reason.

Victor Frankl was an Austrian psychiatrist and Jew who survived the holocaust camp Auschwitz in World War II. Talk about a depressing time! He wrote about those who survived and those who didn't:

“What was really needed was a fundamental change in our attitude toward life. We had to learn that it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather **what life expected from us**. We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned **by** life — daily and hourly. Our answer must consist in right action and in right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual.

“Ultimately, do not ask ‘What is the meaning of life’, but rather ‘what is life *expecting of you*.’ Each person is questioned by life; and can only answer to life by *answering through their own life*; to life you can only respond by being responsible. This is the very essence of human existence.

Frankl continued:

“Love is the only way to grasp another human being in their innermost core. No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless they love them. Love enables you to see the essential traits and features in the other; and even more, you see the potential in them, even if it's not there yet. Through love you make them aware of what they can be and then they can make that a reality.”

Frankl's answer to the holocaust was to make your life a life of meaning, through love. Enable others to grasp their potential.

The people in Ezekiel's time had become spiritually dead. The people in Frankl's time were spiritually dead. Many people today – are spiritually dead. *Their lives contribute no meaning.*

Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: “I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

You are **not** of the spiritually dead. You are the Image of God! As Paul wrote: “you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Christ is in you. You have life through His Spirit.”

Jesus said to Martha, Jesus says to us: **“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”**

Do you believe this?

Jesus is the turning from an empty life, a dead life, to a life of meaning, a life of vitality and

purpose. Jesus is enabling people to reach their potential. Jesus is knowing that God calls us to service, and thereby serving, in His name. Serve, and watch God resurrect the lifeless.

Jesus said to Mary, Jesus says to us: "If you believe, you will see the glory of God."

And Jesus rose Lazarus from the dead.

Believe. Live lives of meaning. Be filled with Christ.

Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones
Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones
Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones
Now hear the word of the Lord!

Amen.