

Ezekiel 37:1-14

8 Dec. 2013

“The Hand of the Lord Is Upon You; The Spirit of the Lord Is within You”

For today’s message I want to focus in on just a couple words and phrases. The first is **Hand** “The hand of the Lord came upon me,” writes Ezekiel. I want you to visualize this. When the hand of the LORD comes upon Ezekiel, where does it land, where is it resting?

Usually when we think of God’s hand we think of God guiding us through a difficult period. Think of the hymn, “Precious Lord, take my hand, lead on, let me stand, I am tired, I am weak, I am worn. Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light. Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.” That description of being tired and weak and worn and needing to be led home fit Ezekiel a T. He was one of those led off into exile in Babylon. Weak, yes. Worn, yes. Needing to be led home absolutely.

But I don’t quite think that’s the role the hand of the LORD plays here. When Ezekiel writes, “The hand of the Lord came upon me,” he seems to be describing a hand that nudges, even pushes into an uncomfortable place and into action. The uncomfortable place is the valley of dry bones. Talk about the valley of the shadow of death! This one is filled with bones that have been picked clean by carrion birds and bleached dry and brittle by the sun. The hand of the LORD does indeed lead us. Sometimes it is a gentle leading, a guiding strength through the storms and dark places. And sometimes the hand of the LORD is upon us to nudge, even push us into uncomfortable places, perhaps because there is something we need to see or because there is something the LORD wants us to do.

So for example, I don’t find going to prison to be going to an uncomfortable place. But that’s because I’ve ben doing it for awhile. The first time I went to prison ministry I was entirely on my own. I got through security, and the guard to pointed to a building about 100 yards away and said, “It’s over three.” All I had to do was walk across the yards **THAT WAS FULL OF PRISONERS**. That was uncomfortable. Maybe at lunch you can get Terry to tell you about his first experience.

So, here’s my question for you: Is the hand of the LORD upon you? Is it guiding you? Is it nudging, pushing you to a place you might otherwise not go? Can you feel the hand of the LORD upon you? Do you sense the LORD leading you to do something? Can you feel the hand of the LORD upon your shoulder or at your back?

The second word on which I want to focus is **Spirit**. “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.” As Lutheran Christians we believe, we know, the Spirit of the Lord is within us, a gift from God at baptism. We may sometimes feel it and sometimes not, but the Spirit is always present within us working on us, working faith in us. As the hand of the LORD is an outside nudging force, the Spirit of the LORD is an inner one.

The word Spirit gets used to mean a couple different things in this reading. One is the sense of which I just spoke. The other way it gets used might be translated breath or even life. So at the end of today's text when God says, "I will put my 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."

Can these bones live, asks God. The obvious answer is no, they cannot. But with God the obvious answer doesn't necessarily apply. Can the dust of the ground live? Of course not. And yet at creation, "The LORD God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into him, and he became a living being." Can these bones live? You tell me.

Here's my other question for you: do you believe the breath of God, the Spirit of God is within you? Have you ever felt the Spirit working within you? Do you feel God's Spirit now?

Today's Scripture is about where you can find, how can you find life when life seems all dried up? Ezekiel is called to prophesy to the dry bones, to bring the Word of the Lord to dry, brittle, bleached, lifeless bones. This scene from Ezekiel is a stark reminder that death is real. Yes, death is real, but it is not final. This story is about the promise of the Holy Spirit and what the Holy Spirit can do. In Advent we pray for the Holy Spirit to be stirred up and stirred up in us.

In Ezekiel it is the powerful word of God which bring life to the dead. This word of God brings hope to the hopeless, strength to the weak, comfort to the discouraged. We Christians know this word of God as Jesus who said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."

Your sermon challenge this week is this: Be alert to when and where you can bring the powerful Word of the LORD to a hopeless situation.