

## **Dem Dry Bones! Dem Bones Gonna Rise Again!** **Ezekiel 37:1-14**

I have an older brother. Just like me, he is also a pastor. Unlike me, he is a very obedient son and a good student. He served as an army chaplain for several years. He did a great job in the army and so everyone expected that he would be a good candidate for promotion. Unfortunately, he got multidrug-resistant tuberculosis in his second appointment and was hospitalized for several months. He said he couldn't breathe well and was coughing up blood. The symptoms got worse at night so he hardly slept. In his hospital bed, he realized two things. First, his plan for the future was nothing without God. Second, every breath was a blessing.

We don't often realize how important breath is until we lose it, until we can't catch our breath. Breath is a sign of life. No breath means death. This is what happened to Jesus on the cross. "He let out a loud cry and breathed his last" (Mark 15:37). This happened to George Floyd when a police officer knelt on his neck for nine and a half minutes. As he died, he said, "I can't breathe." This has happened to Asian American communities too as hate crimes against us have skyrocketed and we are suffocated by living in fear. "We can't breathe." No breath means death.

"Ruah" is a Hebrew word that refers to breath. But 'ruah' also refers to wind, and spirit. Ruah is the wind that parted the waters and created dry land in Genesis. Ruah is the very breath that God breathed into humans to make us living beings. It was this same spirit that parted the Red Sea and liberated the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. Ruah is the same Spirit that was poured out on the disciples on the Day of Pentecost. Ruah, the breath, the Spirit, means life. No breath means death. No spirit means death.

### **Ruah led Ezekiel to a place of death**

In today's scripture, ruah, the breath, the Spirit of the Lord brings Ezekiel to a valley of very many dry bones. If ruah, the breath, is essential for life, why did the same Spirit of life bring Ezekiel to a place of death? Maybe the spirit of the Lord wanted Ezekiel to honestly face exilic reality and truth. Without facing truth, no matter how painful it is, there is no chance for new life, but only death.

I read in a news article that the Texas House passed a bill that bans teachers from speaking about "white supremacy or white privilege." Talking about racism is difficult for many of us because it evokes a sense of guilt, shame, anger and old trauma. Talking about gun violence, poverty, the climate crisis, wealth inequality, gender inequality from the pulpit is hard because it can bring division and conflict within the church. But as the breath, the Spirit of the Lord, brings Ezekiel to a place of suffering and death, the Spirit brings us to the valley of death. God wants us to be honest about the dry bones of our reality and face the truth. The Spirit doesn't just move in the upper room where the disciples earnestly prayed, but the Spirit of the Lord blows deep down into the valley, the valley of the shadow of death.

The Spirit of God, the breath of life, keeps us honest about realities of sin, injustice and struggle. The Spirit does not lead us to a trouble-free life. Rather, the Spirit lead us to the valley of death and make us face the hard truths and realities of death all around us.

Death is all around us. Covid-19 killed more than 3.4 million people and vaccine inequality contributes to deaths that could be averted. Racism is still very real for many people and those invisible hands of death silently suffocate and kill people of color. There have been on

average, 10 mass shootings in the U.S. each week this year.<sup>1</sup> Military conflict between Israel and Palestine brings death even to children. Terrorist attack targeting teenage girls at an Afghan high school killed more 90 people. More than 700 people have been killed by security forces since Myanmar's military coup. Death is all around us. It's hard to face the reality of suffering. We don't want to see death. We are afraid of facing the realities of suffering and death, so we often ignore them as if they didn't exist, but the breath, the Spirit of God leads us to a valley of death.

### **Can These Bones Live?**

Ruah, the Spirit of the Lord brings Ezekiel to a valley full of dry bones and honestly face dry bones. The same Spirit of the Lord wants us to do the same in faith. Dem bones are part of our broken reality. We see them everywhere if we are honest enough and courageous enough to face them.

The Lord asks Ezekiel, "Son of man, can these bones live?" The same God asks us "can these bones live?" What would you say? We may say "Yes or Amen." But the truth is that resurrections don't come easily. Changing a culture of death seems almost impossible. Dem dry bones of the victims slain by gun violence have been around us for many decades and we see the numbers of them increasing every day. Bones of the victims slain by racial hate crimes and racism have been there for a long time and they are very dry. Dem dry bones of those who lost their breath from poverty and hunger are everywhere. "Can these bones live?"

Ezekiel answered the Lord, "Master God, only you know that." We are often caught in a struggle between life and death, breath and bones. And sometimes, we are unsure if life will win. In the midst of the struggle between breath and bones, at times, we don't know if the breath will bring resurrection to the dry bones. We don't know how long a time it will take for dry bone resurrection. It could take three days or 40 days and 40 nights. It may take 40 years or a hundred and twenty years or much longer. One thing for sure is that we have to go through a valley of death in order to reach life and resurrection.

Only God knows if the bones can live. Even though only God knows whether the dry bones can live, we are still called to serve and speak. After Ezekiel said, "Sovereign lord, you alone know," God tells Ezekiel "Prophesy over these bones: 'Dry bones, listen to the Message of God!'" "I'm bringing the breath of life to you and you'll come to life. I'll attach sinews to you, put meat on your bones, cover you with skin, and breathe life into you. You'll come alive and you'll realize that I am God!" Then later, God tells Ezekiel, "prophesy to the breath. Tell the breath, 'God, the Master, says, Come from the four winds. Come, breath. Breathe on these slain bodies. Breathe life!'" We may not know whether the dry bones can live or how it will work out, but we are still called to prophesy and deliver God's message of life and hope. Just like Ezekiel, we are called to declare "You shall live" to dry bones around us.

Do you know how to do CPR? I recall that our church held a CPR training session a few years ago. I completed CPR training when I was in the army. Before giving CPR, do you remember what to do first? Call 911. Also, check for breathing. If there is no breathing, then you can begin CPR. We don't know if the person who receives CPR will live or not. We don't know if the person's heart will beat again or if his or her breath will ever come back. But we know our breath matters. Our single breath can be the breath of life for the person. Only God knows if the bones will live again, but we still have our job to do. Prophesy over dry bones. Prophesy over

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2021/05/10/995380788/there-have-been-on-average-10-mass-shootings-in-the-u-s-each-week-this-year>

the reality of death that ruah, the Spirit of the Lord, the breath, brings life. Prophecy to people “you shall live!”

### **Follow the Spirit**

Today is the Day of Pentecost. It is the day of celebrating the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. We remember the breath, the Spirit of the Lord, blown into the upper room, but the Spirit also blows down to the valley of dry bones. You may not be in the upper room this morning. You may feel that you are deep in the valley and you can't breathe. But my friends, ruah, the Spirit of the living God, brings the breath of life to us. It may take time, but the breath of life blows upon us.

Ruah, breath means life. If we are able to breathe in and breathe out the breath, it means the Spirit of the Lord is still with us. Deeply inhale the breath of God and prophesy over bones in the valley of death. Bones, dry bones will live again because death cannot stop the breath of God. So breathe in the breath of God and breathe out the breath of God by proclaiming the good news! May the Spirit of the living God continue to breathe in you. Amen.