

The prophet Ezekiel was known to have had some pretty bizarre visions. So out there that they have been likened to dream sequences, drug-induced hallucinations, and even alien abductions. It would be easy to just dismiss Ezekiel as weird or disturbed and move on. Yet to do so would mean missing out on a very particular and valuable perspective. For, Ezekiel spoke not only as a priest and a prophet, but as an exile among exiles. He was part of the first wave of 6<sup>th</sup> century BC captives exiled to Babylon. A group comprised of Israel’s religious, political, and economic elite. Not only were these respected leaders taken by force and made to live for almost 100 years in an enemy land; but, from miles away, they had to hear about ongoing violence to the precious people and sites that remained behind at home, including the destruction of their sacred temple. From where they sat, they were helpless, hopeless, and traumatized. Ezekiel’s horrific images may actually have created a space from which to articulate that which truly was crazy, unspeakably painful and frightening to this community.

These images may be helpful to contemplate as we look out across our own valleys of dry bones. How do we speak about our own polarized government, which would rather cut the most basic of social and community services than fight against an astronomical defense budget? Which would rather let safety nets fall to the ground than tax the wealthy fairly? Which would rather fund prisons than preventive programs for at-risk children? Which would rather take away the hard-won rights of women and laborers than truly attempt to live out this nation’s stated values and ideals? How do we speak about all the foreclosed homes and empty store fronts in our own

community? About our friends who must go to war because, finally, it's the only way to support their families?

Mortal, can these bones live?

Ezekiel looks out across a valley of bones and sees not only a disheartened people, but also their communal history. Can the people remember who they were and are at their very core? Can they reunite their disparate parts to form an integrated, functioning whole?

...To a certain extent, it seems, they can. But a true revival, a reawakening of energy and passion and purpose, requires the breath of God. In a re-creation of the Genesis creation story, the bodies are brought to life only when God blows the breath of life into them. Apart from God, they are hollow shells, whether made of the original dust, or of bones with a history.

Presumably if we believe God is still speaking, we also believe God is still breathing and re-creating life out of destruction even as we worship together right here, right now. We may sometimes feel helpless to dig ourselves out of our own ruts. We may feel powerless to conjure the vision that propels us forward to realize the just, peaceable realm of God. And frankly, like Ezekiel and the exiles, to a large extent, we *are* helpless and powerless. And perhaps that's a good place to start. To admit as much and release our dry, tired bones to God's life-giving care. To give over to God our histories, all our trauma and worry, and our attempts to control or to numb. And then to listen carefully for that still-speaking voice, which lives all around us, including in our own breath.

.....Yahweh breath prayer.....

This too shall pass.

This too shall heal.

All shall be well.

And all shall be well.

And all manner of things shall be well...

Amen.