

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Can you remember a time when a picture you saw come to life? Maybe it was when you had a color television in your home for the first time. Maybe it was when you had a black and white photo restored in color, or when you saw black and white footage turned to color. Maybe it was when you saw a high-definition TV for the first time. Maybe it was when you saw a filter on your phone put one of your pictures in just the right light. Whatever it was, it brought joy to your heart and a smile on your face.

The story from Ezekiel this morning is about things coming to life. It's not your typical story from the Old Testament. Most stories from there talk about historical events that had happened giving promises and guidance from God to prepare you for the future. Now this story from Ezekiel does have a time and place and even direction from God but it's given through a vision, not through a plain telling.

It's not primarily an apocalyptic prophecy about the end times, but it still speaks about a resurrection of the dead. God uses this vision to Ezekiel to bring hope to his people. When Ezekiel was given this vision, God's people were still in exile. They were waiting for God to still deliver them from Babylon.

I don't know about you, but I find when I'm waiting for things it can seem like an eternity. And I'm just talking about waiting for my next doctor's appointment. Now, I'd imagine that the 40 years the Israelites were waiting to be delivered from Babylon seemed like something that would never come. For those were an unpleasant 40 years. A time of living in a country that had worship practices that were bad for your spiritual health. Living in a country that practices a survival of the fittest instead of living in God's gracious and sacrificial love. Living as second-class citizens. To not be able to go to temple.

To not have a place to worship God in the fullness as he had asked where the whole city up in celebration. Instead, they were worshiping God in small circles of people whenever and wherever you can. Could you even make it through a single year?

But in this mist of the Israelite's troubled hearts when they even wondered if God cared for them God gave Ezekiel this vision. Ezekiel saw a valley full of dry bones. God questioned Ezekiel and asked if these bones could come alive. Ezekiel says to God that he should know the answer to that question. Then God says that Ezekiel shall prophesy over these bones. Tell them to hear the Word of the Lord, and that God will breathe life into them. God tells them that when they see these things they will know that God is still God.

So, in Ezekiel's vision Ezekiel prophesied to the dry bones. And the bones came alive. People were formed. Tendons were placed on the bones. Skin covered the joints. But the bodies still had no life to them. But God told Ezekiel to prophesy breath into the bodies so that those who were slain the Israelites who were defeated at war may live. And Ezekiel did so. And an amazing army alive and well - not zombie, but fully human - was ready to represent the Lord. And so, God tells Ezekiel that just as God can make these dry bones come alive so will he bring his tiring people out of Babylon. And when this happens the people of Israel will know that God is still God.

And there did come a day when the Israelites did return to Israel. They were able to be in and run their own nation. But they didn't return as a military force but as a scattered people slowly but surely returning home. Here we can see a God who is faithful to his promises - the promises about God saving his people.

Here in this vision from Ezekiel we see another picture of what God can do like what he did when he created Adam and Eve. When God created man, he breathed life into the dust and made the crown of his creation something beautiful. He made a human. Something he fearfully and wonderfully made.

What does this message from Ezekiel have to do with us Christians today? Yes, humans are still the crown of creation to God. But though we have sinned as we live in this cursed world God still cares about us, and desires for us to live well, and he desires to save us. But whenever I see this passage selected for a Sunday, I think to myself, "how am I supposed to preach on this passage? What are the people supposed to take away?"

In Christian pop music lately, this passage has been referred to more than I have ever heard before. And I must ask why? Is there something I'm missing? Is there something people are longing for more than ever? And the answer I'm coming up with is that people are longing to see a miracle. People are wanting God to bring restoration to their lives...to their community...to those who are hurting...like dry bones coming to full life.

Yes, I hope God answers your prayers and God brings life into people like a black and white film that is remade in full color. And I hope that God will speak into your soul bring you out of all death and darkness and fill you with a life and a joy that is something greater than what any person could imagine for their own life.

This message from Ezekiel is for you as well. You all belong to God. God promises life and salvation to you as well. That while we are dead in our sins in this cursed world that while we are weak in our own strength and can lose hope in this world God gives us his Word, and he promises that there will come a time that he will rescue us.

Today it's difficult to preach the message of Christ crucified for us - the message that our sins are forgiven through Christ's perfect life as he was sacrificed on the cross. For there is a lot of talk about God pouring his spirit into creation --God pouring into broken people --ignorant people and giving them life. But much of the life that is brought to the people comes from receiving the good news God telling the people - that he is a God of his promises - that he said he would save his people, and he has a plan to do it. Let us not let go of this hope.

I know some of you have shared with me some difficult things you are going through, but I bet all of you have even more things that you have yet to share with anyone in this church, and I'd even imagine there are things that you don't realize you are struggling with...just like how I probably have things that I don't realize I'm struggling with. But the message today isn't about a lost hope, nor is it that we ought to be living our lives where others might be thing we are under the influence of some substance. No. As the New Testament Church, we get to be reminded of the certain hope that we have: that not only that God will continue to use the Holy Spirit to bring life into our lives as he leads us to do good works but also that the Holy Spirit will continue to keep our faith strong in our savior Jesus Christ. That in this hope, no matter what comes our way, we don't have to fear or despair. Jesus is alive. Our sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ and his work on the cross. And when Jesus Christ comes again a second time, he will take the dust from our grave and put us back together and bring us into the full and perfect living bodies living for his purpose living in a world for eternity that will be far more remarkable than seeing your favorite black and white film recolored for greater experience. Amen.