

Deep In Our Bones – based on Ezekiel 37: 1-14
Aspen Community UMC
March 9, 2008

Page 1 of 5

Dem Bones, Dem Bones, Dem Dry Bones

Dem Bones, Dem Bones, Dem Dry Bones

Dem Bones, Dem Bones, Dem Dry Bones, hear the word of the Lord.

Your toe bone connected to your foot bone. Your foot bone connected to your ankle bone.

Your ankle bone connected to your leg bone. Your leg bone connected to your thigh bone.

Your thigh bone connected to your hip bone. Your hip bone connected to your back bone.

Your back bone connected to your shoulder bone.

Your shoulder bone connected to your neck bone.

Your neck bone connected to your head bone.

Now hear the word of the Lord.

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Sometimes there is not a bone in our body that can vouch for life being any good -
any good again - and that it is time to hang it up.

Anybody had bones like that – bones in that kind of mood? -

Bones like Ezekiel saw spread out over the valley -
scorched bones on scorched ground.

Ezekiel was a young priest in Jerusalem, and would have been one of the first to
be shuttled out to the desert.

Everyone was there, systematically herded, and removed,
from their homes and their way of life.

And here he has this famous vision.

He is overlooking this valley of dry bones.

He may have felt a little like Will Smith in the movie I Am Legend
which was here at the Isis Theatre not long ago.

The entire population of New York City had been killed or tragically disfigured by
a genetically mutated virus that was supposed to kill all cancer cells
but got out of control itself.

Will, as Dr. Neville, was left to try and turn things around.

I can see a little Ezekiel in him.

Deep In Our Bones – based on Ezekiel 37: 1-14
Aspen Community UMC
March 9, 2008

Page 2 of 5

The prophet Jeremiah told them not to worship the foreign gods.

That must have been a little like saying, "Don't drink the water."

The Hebrews were valuable to the Babylonians.

They were valuable as workers, as artisans, not slaves.

They could keep their identities, religiously and culturally – and settle in small groups.

They began to settle in – resident aliens.

Except they were legal - just exiles who served a purpose - alien nevertheless.

I wonder if their experience in exile -

both their ancestors in Egypt and now in Babylon -

if it sensitized them to what its like to be an alien.

They had a lot of experience of living it.

I wonder if they learned what it was like -

so well – that it was a lesson that went down in history with them – got in their DNA

got in their bones, so to speak.

So that by the time the Christian gospels were written

hospitality to the alien in our land - is a requirement.

Not a nice thing to consider – but a scriptural requirement.

And so, issues with borders and people crossing borders
is one that is often hard to talk about – if we are considering legislation or enforcement
because it is somehow in our bones – what we are expected to do.

My rational thinking may tell me we must be careful who we let in.

My bones tell me that we are all one.

We are all one in the sight of God.

One of those disconnects in being - perhaps a thoughtful and wise citizen
of this nation or any other - and being Christian.

Sometimes it's hard to be both.

I believe we are never to forget what it is like to be displaced.

It's in our bones.

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So, here is this vision:

Deep In Our Bones – based on Ezekiel 37: 1-14
Aspen Community UMC
March 9, 2008

Page 3 of 5

Ezekiel was looking over this valley of bones
And G-d asks him, "Can these bones live?"
Ezekiel answers, "God knows."
And God says to Ezekiel, "Tell these bones to listen."

Listening bones will be breathing bones -
one thing at a time to build back some kind of life.
A little new breath in you - and you shall live - and you shall know that I am the Lord.
And Ezekiel spoke to the bones, and something started happening.
The vision of bones was a way creation itself cared for him - and them.
What about your visions? Do you pay attention to them?

This was a critical transition for these people -
from a tribal religion based on place, Jerusalem -
and king, David – and the belief that
God was theirs and theirs only -
a local Hebrew G-d for a local religion. But - no more.
For it was time to create something new
from the dry bones of an old way of thinking.
It was time to let loose the energy of the universe –
God's power that wants to breathe new life into dead things.

Sometimes we need to be told
in no uncertain terms – that we are going to live again - and live big.
I don't think Ezekiel was in any mood to hear it
but what he did was listen - and act on it.
You know there is a lot about Christians today – that is like these ancient Israelites.
I don't think it matters if we think of ourselves
as conservative or evangelical or charismatic
or literalists, or progressive, or whatever terms you can think of
to describe our different pathways or ways of believing and living.

Deep In Our Bones – based on Ezekiel 37: 1-14
Aspen Community UMC
March 9, 2008

Page 4 of 5

We certainly have some different opinions
and those opinions affect how we live our lives and who we worship with.

But either way,
we seldom want to leave the-way-it-used-to-be
or the way we think it-used-to-be
or the way our parents told us, or someone else told us -
it-used-to-be, those better purer times
when God seemed to love us so safely – so securely.

Like the security of thinking that our religion was the all to end all – like they did.
Now we know that other pathways to the mysteries of our universe and creation
can be just as meaningful and real – in the big picture.
And in the little picture - like when we look at the wording in our orders of worship
and our hymnals and educational literature - they often feel as foreign and outdated
as young Ezekiel, trying to be a priest,
away from the environment - that made it all come alive for him -
his actions as a priest separated from the meaning and circumstance of
life as he and they knew it now.

But new breadth was breathed into those bones, and that religion of the ancient Hebrews
found a new identity and grew into the faith of Judaism.
Rabbi David talked about Judaism needing new software, and we do too.
He knew those bones could come alive again in a new age
and be important for today.

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For there are things about life in 2008 that are as foreign as Babylon
and we look for ways to be in community
right here in a place that is becoming more and more commercial,
more and more disconnected from its roots in community and family, and church.
We find that perhaps we are beginning to see ourselves as a virtual community,
something that did not even exist fifteen years ago,

Deep In Our Bones – based on Ezekiel 37: 1-14
Aspen Community UMC
March 9, 2008

Page 5 of 5

with people who feel connected with us yet who travel broadly
and are here in the flesh, but seldom.

The same words that gave promise to Ezekiel can give promise to us.

“I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live.”

The message to Ezekiel demonstrates the spirit of God is always
inviting us toward new ways to live vital and positive lives.
Sometimes it feels like a return from one kind of exile or an other -
as if we have been wandering in one kind of desert or another.

Around 597 BC with the Israelites it may have felt like
an energy that God let loose on the universe.
And perhaps what we can learn from Ezekiel's experience
is that it is possible to start over even in the bleakest of times
when all looks lost.

There is an energy of the universe that can let loose
and pull things together in ways we would never think.
Deep in our bones is the potential to live again and live full.
Deep in our bones we know it.

And that brings us to Lent and Holy Week and Easter coming up soon.

Visions can be life giving. They can draw us into the future.

They certainly did that for Ezekiel and his crowd.

And the vision of those bones, dem bones -
finding new life, new breath.

You can't get much better than that.