

A NEW REALITY

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

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The Impossible becomes Possible. My father was a story teller. I especially remember his stories of faith. Once we were talking about impossible situations in life when there seemed to be little hope. My dad was 14 years old when World War II started. He was milking the cows in the field early in the morning. What was usually a very quiet activity turned into an atmosphere of loud engines flying overhead. My grandfather turned to my father and stated, "Now we have war". My parents thought this may be the end of the world! In a short time the Nazi army had taken over control of the Netherlands! The times were desperate! The people were in search of hope – the churches were filled to the rafters.

Dad also shared a story that happened just outside of the farm when he was about 18. He was walking with his brother home along the road and saw one of the barn cats starting to cross the road. The cat did not realize that a speeding car was coming up fast. Dad heard the car hit the cat with a thud. After accessing the situation, dad and his brother with total certainty concluded the cat's life was over and they threw the cat in the ditch. At milking time, the same cat appeared drinking from the cat bowl! Have you ever been sure something was dead and later found it to be alive?

Facing a huge obstacle in your life: When was the last time you faced an impossible obstacle? Do you remember the feeling of hopelessness? The other night, I heard a woman speak about her journey with depression. She wanted so much to have joy and live a normal life, but the sadness kept coming back.

A Valley Filled with Dry Bones. Speaking of a hopeless situation! Ezekiel is given this vision of dry bones representing the Israelites. Their people and their cities have been destroyed and now they were living in exile. Any chance of a normal life was gone. It is actually quite a ridiculous picture of hopelessness. But that is the point.

If you say so.... In the vision God asks Ezekiel, "Mortal, can these bones live?" Ezekiel answered, "O Lord you know." What kind of question is this? In this totally impossible situation, it is a question of faith? When we are facing an impossible situation the question comes to you as well-- from our loving God. The question could be something like this: Can this hopeless situation have new life or healing? Your answer in faith is: "O Lord, you know."

The problem with fear and cynicism: A hope in the midst of obstacles in one's life sees beyond the obstacle. The existing problem therefore does not consume though it is still present. Fear on the other hand takes away energy, and draws us to focus on the problem.

Similar to fear, Cynicism saps energy and places people in a negative state of mind. *“Cynicism is cancer of the spirit. The bad cells of hopelessness attack the good cells of the spirit and, if undiagnosed, will eventually destroy the spirit.”* Fred Smith

Moving towards a New Reality: In the vision of the dry bones, God was calling Ezekiel (and the Israelites) to move away from fear and cynicism towards a new reality of hope. In an act of amazing love, Jesus overcame the greatest obstacle of life by dying for our sins and defeating death by rising from the dead. As a response, we as Christians are called to live in hope and be healers from hopelessness to those we come in contact with.

A story is told about a program in a large city put in place by the board of education to give instruction to children who are in the hospital and not able to be in school. One day a particular teacher was assigned to give instruction to one of these children. The teacher called the child's regular classroom teacher to get some background. “We are studying nouns and adverbs right now”, the regular teacher said. “I am grateful that you are doing this so he does not fall too far behind.” When the hospital teacher came to the boy he was shocked at the boy's condition. He was badly burned and in great pain. Quite upset at the sight of the boy, she stammered as she told the boy that she was there to help him with nouns and adverbs.

When she left, she felt that she had not accomplished much. The following day, the nurse asked the teacher what she had done with the boy. The teacher thought she had done something wrong and started to apologize. “No, No” said the nurse. “You don't know what I mean. We have been very worried about this little boy, but ever since yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He is fighting back, responding to treatment. It is as though he decided he wants to live!” Two weeks later the boy explained he had given up hope until the teacher arrived. Everything changed for him when he had the simple realization. He said, “They would not send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?”

The words of God are powerful. Will these bones live? We have the promise that in spite of the situation around us and in the world, these bones will live! Fight fear and cynicism! The daily news seems to instill a feeling of fear. We are continually asked, “Are we safe enough?” Certainly, one wants to have proper security, but not to be preoccupied with it! Speak a new reality of hope to your next door neighbour. Do an act of kindness to help instill hope that people still do care in spite of the greed and individualism in our society. Speak to someone today and every Sunday at church whom you do not know – I am serious! You will see a change! There is enough dryness and cynicism around to last a lifetime. Open the doors and windows and let the Holy Spirit move around to show others what the new reality of hope looks like. In Jesus' name, Amen.