

Reflection for Lent 5 (29/3/2020) by Megan Cambridge

All our readings today; the Gospel story, the Psalm and the Epistle, remind us that God not only gives life, but restores life; that death will not have the last word, even when all signs of life have been taken away. All the readings begin with a dark period then move to a different conclusion – inspiring life, and starting afresh, looking ahead to the events of Holy Week and Easter. Whether it's the dry bones taking on life; the Psalmist praising God, who will redeem Israel; Lazarus being raised from the dead; or the journey outlined in Romans, from flesh to spirit, suffering does not have the last word.

In the dramatic reading from Ezekiel, a prophet raised up by God for Israel exiled in Babylon, he is brought by the hand and spirit of God to a valley full of dry human bones symbolic of the people of Israel who recognise their plight: "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely." God asks Ezekiel the question 'can these bones live?'

This is the God who created the world, who breathed life into Adam and who brought a whole people into being from a childless couple in Haran and who freed their descendants from the living death of slavery in Egypt. He raised up Judges and Kings and Prophets calling them to life again and again while the people continue to choose death.

Ezekiel's vision is given for a people who have lost heart, who are suffering a death of spirit a living death in exile in a foreign land. Ezekiel witnesses the soul of his people gradually wither and die, becoming as lifeless as a valley of dry bones.

This vision is held up again today, when so many in the world have had their own experience of dry bones, literally and metaphorically – from Darfur, the Congo and Zimbabwe to Myanmar, Pakistan and Iraq, from the gang slayings and the drug wars in our cities to all those places lacking food or drink or clothing or shelter or respect for life. There is a physical toll that people continue to pay but also a spiritual One that poverty natural disasters and genocide exact from people to reduce them to a state of 'dry bones'. God tells the prophet to speak to the bones. God calls the breath to come from the 4 winds and breath over the slain. The spirit of God the lifegiving 'ruach' God.

This breath moves in the story of Lazarus, is breathed into the crucified Christ lifting him to a resurrection life and touched us when the spirit came upon us at Baptism. This breath moves through the world raising people into new life when all the odds are against it. We need to hear and share this vision – it's a scene meant to live in the imagination and the heart.

1 Breathe on me, breath of God:
fill me with life anew,
that I may love as you have loved
and do as you would do.

2 Breathe on me, breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until my will is one with yours
to do and to endure.

3 Breathe on me, breath of God;
fulfil my heart's desire,
until this earthly part of me
glows with your heavenly fire.

4 Breathe on me, breath of God;
so shall I never die,
but live with you the perfect life
of your eternity.

Edwin Hatch (1835 - 1889)