

When It Feels Impossible

Ezekiel 37:1-14
John 11:1-6

April 2, 2017
Faith Community

Ezekiel was a prophet of God who lived in hard times. Israel was a mess. The country had been invaded, broken up, and the people deported. The occupants of the God given Promised Land were defeated and tossed about like a valley of dry bones.

God gets hold of Ezekiel and plops him right in the middle of the whole thing. If a priest had contact with human bones, he would become ritually unclean. For them to be left out in the open like that was unthinkable by Jewish custom.

Has that ever happened to you? You look back at a life of great promise, a relationship that was to last forever, a project of profound potential, only now you're surrounded by the dusty dry bones of defeated dreams. It's not right. It's not fair. It wasn't supposed to be like this.

There's Ezekiel surrounded by the dry bones of defeat and disgrace, and the question he gets is this:

Son of man, can these bones live? (Ez. 37:3)

How do you answer a question like that? For that matter, if God led Ezekiel into the valley of the shadow of death, why should you and I be different?

While it appears to be a no brainer, the fate of the whole thing would rest in how he answered. When the bottom falls out of your life, it'll be how you respond that will make the difference.

Ezekiel answered,

O Sovereign Lord, you alone know. (Ez. 37:3)

That's when Ezekiel became God's agent to work a wonder. There was wisdom beyond his years in that response. Without God, he and the whole country were dead in the water.

In our New Testament reading, Lazarus, a dear friend of Jesus, is sick. His sisters, Mary and Martha, get word to him, and what does he do?

Nothing!
Zip!
He does not budge.

Two more days pass; Jesus goes nowhere; Lazarus dies.

He finally makes it to Lazarus' place, and his sister Martha runs out to give him a piece of her mind:

“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (John 11:21)

Listen to what comes next:

But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask. (John 11:22)

Wisdom beyond her years went into that answer. There's a picture of deep anger and even deeper faith. She expressed both. Too many of us don't make it to the faith part because we don't deal with the anger.

How do you find courage like that?

So here's Ezekiel, looking downright silly, yakking away in the middle of an above ground cemetery, talking to lifeless things, but by the grace of God those bones come together and Ezekiel becomes part of a God given promise to restore an entire country.

Here's Martha, confronting Jesus, who didn't jump in the midst of her emergency but affirmed her own faith even in the midst of her anger. Jesus responded:

“I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.” (John 11:25-26)

Watch Ezekiel, friends.

Watch Martha.

Dig deep.

Do not settle for simplistic cop outs that keep you stuck in a cycle of fault finding and excuse making.

Instead, remember the twin towers of hope from last week:

***I am not defined by my past.
I will not put boundaries around my future.***

When your world caves in, think of Ezekiel, and consider Martha. In the process,

If you dig deep enough,
If you listen,
If you pay attention,
You may learn the most important lesson of your life:

Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord.
(Ez. 37:13)

That phrase is found 65 times in the book of Ezekiel. The deeper purpose of the country's restoration was that God would be known by the people themselves and by the watching world.

The deeper purpose in raising Lazarus was so the world would know that,

I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. (John 11:25-26)

How might God be praised in the waiting or uncertainty of your life? What's your deeper purpose?