

**Ezekiel: The Way of Life**

Ezekiel 37: 1-14  
Luke 18: 31-34

A Sermon Preached by Peter Ilgenfritz  
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*Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.*

We spend a lot of our lives keeping things together.

But sometimes, despite our best efforts, things fall apart.

And when they do, we often respond with denial or despair.

We deny that anything is broken.

Shut our eyes.

Look the other way.

Act as if everything is just fine.

We despair.

All we see is the brokenness.

All we know is this pain, this hurt.

We are unwilling to do anything believing that life is now over.

Ezekiel is the great Biblical guide to finding life when things fall apart.

It's 587 B.C. and the Babylon army has marched into the streets of Jerusalem and conquered the tiny kingdom of Judah. For years Ezekiel's countrymen denied that anything was wrong.

But now despair fills their eyes as they see loved ones killed, their freedom taken away, their belief and understanding of God stripped from them, their land taken away as they are sent into exile in Bablylon.

But in this place where everything has fallen apart, Ezekiel sees what his people couldn't or wouldn't see.

Ezekiel has a vision of God taking him to a valley of dry bones.

God says to Ezekiel, "These bones are the bones of your people. Listen to what they are saying: Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone, there is nothing left of us."

And Ezekiel sees God working in this broken place forming, making, a new people of God out of what was dry bones.

In this place of brokenness, God bringing new life where there was no hope of life.

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week. In the Gospel of Luke, it is sometime this week before Palm Sunday. Jesus is travelling with his disciples from Galilee to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. Along the way he shares with his friends a vision of what he sees is before them:

*Jesus took the twelve off to the side and said, "Listen carefully. We're on our way up to Jerusalem. Everything written in the Prophets about the Human One will take place. He will be handed over to the Romans, jeered at, made sport of, and spit on. Then, after giving him the third degree, they will kill him. In three days he will rise, alive."*

*But they didn't get it, could make neither heads nor tails of what he was talking about.*  
(Luke 18: 31-34)

It seems absurd. We wonder where is God when we go through the depths, through rejection, suffering, hurt, loss. We think we have gotten off the Way – that God must have forgotten us.

But in this place where it seems God has gone away is the place God is found. For the Christian, this place of brokenness is the place where the Way to new life begins. But to get this new life, we have to die to the old life that is in us.

In the weeks to come, everything fell apart.  
Some denied and fled in fear.  
Some despaired and locked themselves in the upper room.  
And some grieving disciples, who had abandoned all hope, were surprised on the Emmaus Road by the presence of the Risen Christ. What could not happen had happened – once again God bringing life where there was no hope of life.

This is Ezekiel's vision.  
This is Jesus' way.  
And to call yourself a Christian today is to say that this is your way.

Some of you know how much you need this story today.  
You know it is why you are here today.  
You can point right at the broken place in your life.  
It is right here in this relationship,  
this situation,  
this secret you are holding.  
You have scurried around in denial and despair long enough.  
Now is the time you are being called to choose another way.  
To name the brokenness so that God might have room to gain a foothold in your life and bring new life where there is no hope of life.

We choose everyday to follow the way of death, denial and despair, or the way of life. We choose in every encounter, every conversation. If we practice choosing life in the intimate conversations of our life, we may be better prepared to choose life when things fall apart as they will and do at times in major ways in our lives.

But just because these encounters are small and particular doesn't mean they are easy.

"Pedro it is time to eat."

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I've called him three times and he is still sitting there typing away at the computer.

"Oh it doesn't matter – he's just a kid".

"This is no big deal that he doesn't come when I call him."

It is amazing how quickly I run to denying that anything is wrong.

And maybe, like I've done it before, I'll call a fourth, fifth, tenth time....

But today, I don't keep calling. I stop at three times.

It is amazing how quickly I run to despair.

"I am an awful parent. I don't have a clue what I am doing".

And just as quickly, "He is an awful kid."

I can just picture myself storming out into the other room yelling at him to get out here.

My anger trying to say something that is beyond words.

But this day, I don't yell.

I stand here in the kitchen.

I realize I don't know have a clue what to do.

I stand there for quite a while in that empty space of "not knowing" between denial and despair.

I pray, if a prayer is, "God I don't have a clue what to do."

I walk into the living room.

Sit down next to him at the computer, look at him with care, with love, and say six words,

"I feel like you're ignoring me."

And then comes what I knew was coming, a volcano of denial, "I not ignore you. I respect you..."

I sit there, and today the storm doesn't gather me up into it.

And as the volcano quiets, I smile and say, "Look, guy, all I'm asking is that you come and sit down with me and eat."

And here we are in the kitchen talking and laughing about Mexican football and putting food on the table together.

Every conversation is a conversation with ourselves, and sometimes our conversations involve other people.

The heart of the issue is this: Pedro is not the only person in the room ignoring me.

I ignore myself.

I deny what I need.

Maybe you, like me, despair at naming what you need for fear that it will lead to a brokenness that may not have another side.  
You doubt the possibility of new life.

For all of us, there is a conversation out there with our name on it that we have been avoiding for days, months, even years.  
A conversation with our boss, our spouse, a friend, our child.  
Or maybe, most importantly, a conversation with yourself.

Being real is not the risk.  
The real risk is:  
I will be seen.  
I will be known.  
I will be changed.

There is something that I want.  
Something that I wonder if you might want as well.  
Something that is more important even than keeping things together.

To let the Spirit of the Living God, do God's work in us.  
In the broken, dry bones of our lives, to breathe new life where we have stopped believing there was any hope left for us.

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Sources:

I am grateful for Eugene Peterson's summary of Ezekiel and way with words in the Introduction to Ezekiel in [The Message](#).

I am grateful to what I am learning about listening and speaking with care from Susan Scott in her two books, [Fierce Conversations](#) and [Fierce Leadership](#)