



**Lent 5, Year A – April 10, 2011**

Ezekiel 37.1-14

**A Homily preached by the Venerable M. Ansley Tucker**

*Take him earth, for cherishing;  
to thy tender breast receive him,  
body of a man I bring thee,  
noble even in its ruin.*

*Once was this a spirit's dwelling  
by the breath of God created;  
high the heart that here was beating,  
Christ the prince of all its living... (Prudentius, trans Helen Waddell)*

But no more. What Ezekiel sees is a valley of very dry bones – picked clean, bleached white, marrowless, devoid of even the memory of life.

And the voice says to him, "Mortal, can these bones live?"

Now, remember, Ezekiel writes for a people in exile. The Babylonians have besieged Jerusalem, and destroyed and plundered the Temple – which means, they have overturned the entire cult of sacrifice and religious observance. The best and the brightest have been force-marched to Babylon, captives in a strange land where their culture and language are repressed, and they must agonize over their weak and vulnerable who have been left behind (for what use are the elderly, or lame, or the blind, to the king of Babylon?) Imagine if you will the oppressive sadness, the bone-wearying fatigue. Their resilience has been depleted, the very marrow of life drained. There is no energy to reach within yourself and find the strength even to keep on keeping on.

Surely there are times, perhaps for some of us even now, when we have lived in this place of parched desolation. When all has turned to dust and ashes on our plate, and we see our world in shades of grey. When we are bone weary, dispirited, and without purpose, interest, or hope.

And the voice says to Ezekiel, "Mortal, can these bones live?"

Ezekiel isn't counting on it. He hedges, "O Lord God, you know." In other words, "Don't ask me!"

Which, I think, is how we feel when we find ourselves in the valley of "very dry bones."

God wastes no time showing Ezekiel the answer to his question. He commands the prophet to prophesy to the bones, to prophesy to the wind, and behold, "the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude."

Ezekiel should have known – and so should we.

For ours the God who created the heavens and the earth, when there was but a formless void. Who fashioned a living being out of the dust of the earth. Ours is

the God who called the elderly Abraham and the barren Sarai out of Haran, and from them brought forth his people Israel. Ours is the God brought slaves to freedom, and wanderers in the wilderness to the Promised Land. Ours is the God who spoke his Word, and gave us a Son by a Virgin named Mary. Ours is the God who makes the way of the cross to be the way of life.<sup>1</sup>

Can these bones live?

Yes, by God. They can.

Just you wait and see.

---

© M. Ansley Tucker, 2011

---

<sup>1</sup> The idea that God acts in character in this passage is borrowed from James A. Wallace, in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, David L. Bartlett & Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., Year A, vol. 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 125.