THE DEAD SHALL LIVE
(EZEKIEL 37.1-14)

WHEN I WAS ORDAINED INTO THE MINISTRY, THE ATTENDING PASTORS ALL PLACED THEIR HANDS ON MY HEAD AND QUOTED SCRIPTURES. AFTER THE SERVICE ONE OF MY RELATIVES ASKED ME WHAT WHAT IT FELT LIKE WITH THEIR HANDS UPON. I ANSWERED, "HEAVY." CAN YOU IMAGINE THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL IN HIS VISION WHEN THE HAND OF THE LORD WAS UPON HIM? NOT ONLY WAS THE LORD'S HAND UPON HIM BUT HE WAS TOTALLY ENGULFED IN THOSE HANDS. HEAVY INDEED.

THE HAND OF THE LORD UPON HIM,
EZEKIEL LIFTED HIGH,
BROUGHT HERE BY THE LORD'S OWN SPIRIT,
THE VALLEY BLEAK AND DRY.

A PLACE OF DEATH AND AGED BONES
BEFORE EZEKIEL LAY,
AND BACK AND FORTH THE SPIRIT LED
THE PROPHET ON HIS WAY.

GOD SAID, "OH PROPHET, PROPHESY:
'OH DRY BONES, HEAR THE WORD;
I'LL CAUSE MY BREATH TO ENTER YOU,
THE LORD YOU WILL HAVE HEARD.

'I'LL BRING NEW FLESH TO BIND ON YOU
AND OVERLAY WITH SKIN.'"

GOD'S WORD EZEKIEL PROPHESIED,
THEN HEARD A RATTLING DIN.

BEFORE HIS EYES THE BONES
CONFORMED,
AS BONE TO BONE WAS KNIT;
TO THEM THE FLESH AND TENDONS
CLUNG
AS JOINT TO JOINT WAS FIT.

ALTHOUGH THE BONES IN FLESH
APPEARED,
EZEKIEL HEARD NO BREATH,
THE BODIES LOOKED TO HIM LIKE MEN
UPON THEIR BACKS IN DEATH!

GOD SAID, "OH PROPHET, PROPHESY,
DIRECTLY TO THE BREATH,
BRING FORTH THE FOUR WINDS LIFE TO
BREATHE
INTO THESE MEN OF DEATH."

THEN UP THE MEN OF DEATH AROSE,
THE BREATH OF GOD HAD BLOWN,
AN ARMY VAST THEY TOOK THEIR STAND
WHERE ONCE THEY HAD BEEN BONE.

THE HAND OF THE LORD UPON HIM,
EZEKIEL PROPHESIED,
PROCLAIMED THE HOLY SPIRIT'S WIND
WOULD BREATHE IN MAN WHO'D DIED.

DEAD AS THE DRY BONES MAN ONCE
LAY,
THE DEBT FOR SIN IS DEATH,
BUT NOW FROM DEATH TO LIFE HE'S
CROSSED
IN GOD'S OWN MIGHTY BREATH.

I HEARD ABOUT A MAN, A PASTOR, IN FACT, WHO SAID, "I AM CONVINCED THAT IF THEY EVER FOUND THE TOMB OF JESUS THEY WOULD FIND BONES INSIDE." THIS MAN, YES, THIS PASTOR,

HAD LOST HIS FAITH IN JESUS AND NO LONGER BELIEVED IN THE RESURRECTION. BUT WHAT DID THE PROPHET EZEKIEL SAY? NAMELY, THAT GOD, WOULD BREATHE THE HOLY SPIRIT INTO OUR DEAD BONES AND LIVEN OUR FLESH.

AT THIS TIME IN BIBLICAL HISTORY THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH WERE SUFFERING THE FATE OF EXILE AND SLAVERY. THEY HAD PRACTICALLY BEEN BURIED IN THE DUST OF THE DESERT. THEIR HOPE HAD DWINDLED TO NOTHING BECAUSE THEIR HOPE WAS HUMANLY BASED. THEIR ARMIES HAD BEEN VANQUISHED AND THEIR PROWESS HAD VANISHED, BLOWN AWAY IN THE WIND. THE NATION WAS IN DESPAIR. HOWEVER, GOD COMMISSIONED HIS MAN EZEKIEL TO COME TO THE PEOPLE WITH THE LORD'S DIVINE HOPE, FOR "PROSPECTS OF NATIONAL REVIVAL WERE AS UNLIKELY AS EXPECTING A VAST ARMY OF SKELETONS, DRIED AND DISMEMBERED,TO COME TO LIFE AGAIN" (LSB).

WHAT DO YOU THINK WHEN YOU SEE A DEAD SKUNK ON THE HIGHWAY, STINKING, RIPPED TO PIECES BY THE TIRE OF A SPEEDING AUTOMOBILE? I KNOW WHAT I THINK. THAT ANIMAL IS I, **DEAD IN TRESPASSES AND SIN** (EPHESIANS 2.1). THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH KNEW THEY WERE CONQUERED BY THE BABYLONIANS, BUT I—AND YOU —WERE CONQUERED BY TRESPASSES AND SIN. THE ONLY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THAT DEAD SKUNK ON ;THE ROAD AND ME—AND YOU—IS THAT YOU WILL LIVE AGAIN AND THE SKUNK WILL NOT. BECAUSE JESUS DIED FOR OUR SINS AND **WAS DELIVERED UP FOR OUR TRESPASSES AND RAISED FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION,** AS WE CONTEMPLATE IN THIS SEASON OF LENT, WE WILL COME ALIVE AT THE RISING OF THE JUST.

THINK OF THOSE DEAD MEN WHOM EZEKIEL SAW IN THE CREVASSE OF THE VALLEY, QUITE DEAD, DRY AS THE DUST OF THE WIND. THEY ARE YOU AND I. BUT NOW THINK OF THEM WITH THE BREATH OF GOD BREATHED INTO THIER BEINGS. THEY ALLSO ARE YOU AND I.

WHY ARE WE DWELLING ON THE RESURRECTION IN THIS PERIOD OF LENT? WE ARE DWELLING ON IT FOR THE SAME REASON THAT IN THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT THE THIRD CANDLE TURNS FROM PURPLE OF PINK. IT DOES THAT TO CHEERFULLY REMIND US THAT CHRISTMAS IS NEARING US DAY BY DAY. SO IT IS WE THINK OF THE RESURRECTION IN LENT, FOR EASTER IS GETTING CLOSER AND CLOSER. JESUS IS SUFFERING AND DYING ON THE CROSS FOR OUR SALVATION BUT BY HIS RESURRECTION WE WILL BE GIVEN OUR OWN RESURRECTION. EZEKIEL'S DRY, DEAD BONES IN THE VALLEY ARE THE BONES OF JESUS, AND HIS BONES ARE ALIVE AND WELL, AND THEY ARE NOT IN HIS TOMB.

THOSE BONES ARE OURS TOO. THE LORD SAYS TO THE PROPHET, **THESE BONES ARE THE WHOLE HOUSE OF ISRAEL. BEHOLD, THEY SAY, "OUR BONES ARE DRIED UP, AND OUR HOPE IS LOST; WE ARE INDEED CUT OFF." THEREFORE, PROPHESY, AND SAY TO THEM, "THUS SAYS THE LORD GOD: BEHOLD, I WILL OPEN YOUR GRAVES, O MY PEOPLE, AND I WILL BRING YOU INTO THE LAND OF ISRAEL** NOW THAT LAND OF ISRAEL IS NOT THE LAND OF SAND AND SALT WHICH WE KNOW TODAY BUT THE **ISRAEL OF GOD** (GALATIANS 6.16). AS THE APOSTLE PAUL TELLS US, AND THAT ISRAEL IS THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN PREPARED FOR US BY JESUS HIMSELF (JOHN 14.3).

I AM ALWAYS IMPRESSED AND COMFORTED BY THE ACCOUNT IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN WHERE MARTHA MEETS JESUS FOUR DAYS AFTER THE DEATH OF HER BROTHER LAZARUS. SHE TELLS JESUS THAT IF HE HAD BEEN PRESENT HER BROTHER WOULD NOT HAVE DIED. JESUS THEN SAYS THESE ASTONISHING WORDS: **YOUR BROTHER WILL RISE AGAIN.** MARTHA THEN EXPRESSES HER FAITH IN JESUS: **I KNOW THAT HE WILL RISE AGAIN IN THE RESURRECTION ON THE LAST DAY,** TO WHICH JESUS SAYS, **I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.** THEN THE UNIMAGINABLE AND THE SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE OCCURS: LAZARUS RISES FROM THE DEAD. HE WAS NOTHING BUT A DEAD BONE, BUT HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD, AND THOSE AROUND HIM HAD TO QUICKLY RIP OFF THE DEATH CLOTH FROM HIS FACE SO THAT HE WOULD NOT SUFFOCATE. LAZARUS WAS DEAD BUT RISEN TO LIFE WHICH IS PREDICTIVE OF OUR OWN DEATH AND RESURRECTION. HOW CAN THIS BE? THE ANSWER IS PURE AND SIMPLE: BECAUSE JESUS HIMSELF WILL SUFFER AND DIE AND RISE FROM THE DEAD (JOHN 11.17-44).

MY FRIENDS, IF WE DWELL ONLY ON OUR MORTALITY, WE DWELL ON NOTHING, AND THE SEASON OF LENT IS A PILE OF DEAD, DRY BONES. BUT IF WE DWELL ON DEATH FOLLOWED BY THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD AND OUR OWN PROMISED AND PREDICTED RESURRECTION, OUR BONES SHALL LIVE ETERNAL LIFE. AMEN.

Rev. Dr. Giles Zimmer