

“A BREATH OF FRESH AIR”

The Day of Pentecost

Ezekiel 37:9-10

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Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Because I love language, Ezekiel may be my favorite prophet, even though prophets aren't used to being well-liked and popular. The role of the prophet is to look at the world and report what s/he sees. In the case of a religious prophet, the reporting compares what *is* to what God *wants*.

More than a hundred years ago, Peter Finley Dunne—no, I never heard of him either—wrote, “The role of the newspaper is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” Centuries earlier, prophets adopted this as their job description. Another wonderful quotation from the man I've never heard of: “A fanatic is a man who does what he thinks the Lord would do—if the Lord knew the facts of the case.” There's a lot of that going around these days.

After a rebellion against Babylon, Ezekiel was one of those taken from Jerusalem to Babylon ca. 593 BC. He lived there for 20+ years. He is one of the principal voices prophesying the return to Jerusalem.

We live in challenging times. Today's world seems to cry out for a prophet. I watch the news these days much less often than I used to. I sit there, like a fool vainly expecting something better to happen. I'm the subject of a verse from the book of Proverbs: “Like a dog that returns to its vomit, so is a fool who reverts to his folly.” Think about it.

Having conjured up a grim picture, I'd like to mention two recent books arguing the opposite. I've not read either of them. Perhaps some of you have. The authors are prophetic, in this case attempting to comfort the afflicted.

The first book is called *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World—and Why Things Are Better Than You Think*, a book Bill Gates, no dummy, claims everyone should read. “Factfulness” is reminiscent to me of “Truthiness” as made popular by Stephen Colbert. Let those who understand, understand.

Hans Rosling, author of *Factfulness*, believes many people are ignorant of how much

progress has been made in the world and too pessimistic about the future. A great many things have improved and will continue to improve, all the more so if we have faith this is so.

The blurb reads:

Our problem is that we don't know what we don't know, and even our guesses are informed by unconscious and predictable biases. It turns out that the world, for all its imperfections, is in a much better state than we might think. That doesn't mean there aren't real concerns. But when we worry about everything all the time instead of embracing a worldview based on facts, we can lose our ability to focus on the things that threaten us most.

Here we are, stuck in Babylon, and we'll never go home again. Not so, says Ezekiel, this Exile thing is just temporary. The scattered, dry bones of Israel will reconnect. God will breathe new life, a new spirit into them. Have faith.

The second book is *The Soul of America: The Battle for Our Better Angels*, written by noted historian and faithful Episcopalian Jon Meacham. The blurb has this to say:

Our current climate of partisan fury is not new, and in *The Soul of America* Meacham shows us how what Abraham Lincoln called the “better angels of our nature” have repeatedly won the day ... While the American story has not always—or even often—been heroic, we have been sustained by a belief in progress even in the gloomiest of times. In this inspiring book, Meacham reassures us, “The good news is that we have come through such darkness before”—as, time and again, Lincoln's better angels have found a way to prevail.

Faith in God is critical for our life together. Faith that right will prevail, discord be reduced, and we will unite to save the future is vitally important. Now I am going to reread today's lesson from Ezekiel. I ask you to listen to it not as ancient history, but with awareness of today's current events. Pray the Holy Spirit to come into our own lives, the lives of our community, the nation, and the world.

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act," says the LORD.