

Sermon - April 2, 2017  
Waterford Mennonite Church  
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Ezekiel 37:1-14

One day I was teaching a group of 1st-3rd graders about the creation story. And I got to the part where God breathes into Adam so that Adam has life. And that it's sort of like every single breath we have is God blowing air into our mouths and into our lungs, filling us with life. Isn't that soo cool? God is so powerful and so near to us!

And one little girl puckered up her face and said "Ewwwww....I hope God brushed his teeth!"

(And this is why all of you should sign up to teach children next year (haha). )

The breath of God is amazing. But what happens when we run out of breath?

I was in 6th grade gym class and a classmate had a severe asthma attack and was gulping for breath. We were outside and the nurse's office was on the other side of the building. The teacher asked me to take her to the nurse. I grabbed her hand and started leading her there. The walk took us forever. She was wheezing and panicking and hunched over, and I remember feeling terrified that she wouldn't find the air to her lungs again.

Have you ever felt unable to breathe? It's a terrible feeling. Whether you've been swimming and couldn't find the surface or running and couldn't catch your breath or fell and had the wind knocked out, or experiencing anxiety to the level of panic. Or when your hope is lost and you are crying so hard that you can't catch your breath.

The people of God in our story cannot breathe.  
They have become dry bones.  
Their hope is lost.

They cannot see a future anymore.  
Their enemies dragged them from their homes  
Their place of worship smashed to bits  
Their loved ones taken captive  
Their graveyards are heaps of dry bones in a desolate valley...

People of God, have you lost your breath?  
Is your hope gone? (can these bones live?)

It's this question God asks the prophet Ezekiel. God says "Can these bones live?"

Does Ezekiel have any hope left? How can he answer that question...He has experienced so much death and destruction in his world of Babylonian captivity....has all hope squelched out of his lungs?

Can these bones live?

One would expect Ezekiel to give the obvious answer....  
From the place of not being able to catch his breath  
Of weeping and struggle....  
to give a deep sigh and a shake his head. Defeated. No. These bones cannot live.

They are dry. Maybe 20 years dry. The pieces aren't all there anymore.  
The hope is gone.

But Ezekiel squishes out the littlest bit of hope and faith...still hanging on to the tiniest thread or shallowest breath and says, "Lord, you know."

And then the scene unfolds.

Ezekiel's lungs fill and his voice rings out as he prophesies to the dry bones and they come to life like an earthquake. The foot bone to the shin bone, the shin bone to the knee bone, the knee bone to the thigh bone, hear the word of the Lord! And he prophesies to the wind....I wonder how loud and strong the wind blew from the four corners - the tornado of the breath of God fills the nostrils and the lungs of the multitude who can shout and sing and run and laugh and breathe again.

The poetry of this image is amazing. We miss it in our English Bibles, but the word that repeats over and over again is "Ruach" - It means spirit. It also means breath. And it means wind. God's spirit is the breath which is the wind.

Our breath is a mystery. A deep breath in and out can calm our hearts  
And still our anxious minds.  
The simple act of breathing can heal and revive.

Our breathing is so shallow most of the time, and it restores our bodies to take deep breaths.

Try this with me....

Put your hands on your belly...

Breathe one time and see if you can fill up every part of your stomach like a balloon

And then let's give one giant sigh together.

Our world is full of people who have lost their breath. Some in this very room today might be feeling like the dry bones struggling to catch their breath....

And in the midst of hopelessness we hear God ask....Can these dry bones live?

Do I believe they can? When I look out over Syria. Or Palestine. Afghanistan or the Congo. God, I'm not so sure I see hope. It seems so absurd. With no solutions. No progress. No fixes. Can these bones live? I want to give a deep sigh with the air leaving my lungs. defeated. shaking my head. No. They don't live.

The African American Slaves believed the dry bones could live.

Working on the fields day after day through torture and pain these people of God took this story and filled their lungs and began to sing.

A people who lost their breath began to sing.

And they sang the life right back into their dry bones...Them bones them bones them dry bones them bones them bones them dry bones them bones them bones them bones hear the world of the Lord.

Can these dry bones live?

M.J. thought they could.

He looked at the Congo - a valley of dry bones....the bones of children, some dead for 20 years since the war began....

Can these bones live?

M.J. said 'yes, Lord, you know they live.'

And M.J.'s witness is so powerful to us....because he prophesied to the bones.

And the spirit of God put breath into M.J.'s lungs and he used his breath to convince 1,600 to put down their weapons and go home.

The dry bones live.

People of God, have you lost your breath?

Is your hope gone?

Sometimes it seems that death has won. (this week, hearing of M.J.'s death it sure seems like death has won. If M.J. isn't protected, will any of us be?) The victory is in the grave. The bones are dried out. And the battle seems long over.

But God will have the final word.

**For "Thus says the Lord: I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live"**

Resurrection is coming.

So, When you are dry bones and when you are out of breath,

pay close attention,

Because you might be able to smell the garlic on God's breath.

So bring a toothbrush. And breathe it in.