

Sermon: Making Skeletons Dance
Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-14
Date: Sunday, April 29, 2018
Preacher: Rev. Becky Smithey & the Youth/Tweens

Pastor Becky

When I was younger, I worked at Camp Wesley Woods in the mountains of East Tennessee. We learned lots of songs during that summer, but the song that kids loved the most was “Dem Bones”. It became so ingrained in my mind.

The chorus went like this:

Dem bones, dem bones, de gunna walk around
Dem bones, dem bones, de gunna walk around,
Dem bones, dem bones, de gunna walk around,
Now hear the Word of the Lord.

We knew that song so well. We sang it backward and forwards. There were verses that went along with the chorus. Each verse went up a half a note. The verses started with the toe bone.

De toe bone connected to the foot bone.
De foot bone connected to the ankle bone.
De ankle bone connected to the shin bone,
De shin bone connected to the knee bone,
De knee bone connected to the thigh bone,
De thigh bone connected to the hip bone,
De hip bone connected to the back bone,
De neck bone connected to the head bone,
Now hear de Word of de Lord.

Dem bones, dem bones, are gunna walk around;
Dem bones, dem bones, are gunna walk around;
Dem bones, dem bones, are gunna walk around;

Now hear de Word of de Lord. (shaking and wiggling the whole body as the preacher does the chorus)

That’s the way it was done, with the body twiggling, jiggling and wiggling like we imagined a skeleton would do. That is about as wild as it got in my camp days. Our world was mighty tame. Because of the antics and the wiggling that went along with the chorus, that song was deeply embedded in my head.

Now, I want you to know that, as a child, I had never seen a skeleton. It was 9th grade and I was in my biology class when I saw my first skeleton. It was in Mr. Martin’s biology class. In my mind, I saw those bones hanging there in Mr. Martin’s class room in front of the air conditioner and then slowly, those bones began to move rhythmically in my imagination. I saw those bones start moving. “Dem bones, dem bones are gunna walk around. Dem bones dem bones dem bones are gunna walk around.’ When I saw that skeleton, those bones started to

move within my mind. Twiggling, wiggling, and squiggling. I couldn't look at that skeleton without those bones moving, shaking, rattling and rolling. That was in high school, in Mr. Martin's biology class.

Voice 1

Do you know the story behind the "Dem Bones?" Maybe you don't. I would like to tell you the story which is behind the words of the song, "Dem Bones."

The year was 587 BCE, Before Christian Era, Before Comma Era. It was the bottom in the history of the Old Testament nation. It was the low point of Israel's history. Their nation had become like a desert floor covered with dead skeletons in Death Valley. It was kind of like the World War I. No, it was much worse than the World War I. It was more like the Civil War and the battle of Gettysburg and there were dead bodies out there in the fields by the thousands. It was the low point, the worst time in their nation's history. All those bodies were out there, lying on the desert floor. And the whole desert, as far as the eye could see for 360 degrees, was filled with white bones of long dead young men. The Babylonians had wiped out the total Israelite army. It was no contest. The Babylonians were the strongest nation around. Babylonia was a great big nation; Israel was a dinky, little nation. Israel was nothing; their army was nothing and they got wiped out. In 587 BCE, all their young Israelite warriors were killed. Their bodies were sprawled out on the desert sands as far as the eye could see in all directions. Those bodies were not buried but just laid there to rot in the sun.

The temple was destroyed. The capital city was destroyed. The people were in total poverty. Everybody was hungry or on the edge of starvation, so much so that I even hate to tell you this but it is part of the story. From the Book of Lamentations, we are informed that the people were so hungry that mothers boiled their own children for food. It was the low point. Lamentations says, "All the people grown as they search for food but no one gives them anything. The hands of compassionate mothers have boiled their children. They become their food in the destruction of the daughters of the people."

And the Israelite people who were alive were taken as prisoners, chains around their necks, and dragged back to Babylonia. The Jewish nation had become like the dead skeletons strewn across the desert floor in Death Valley.

The Jews began lamenting to themselves, "God can't help us. God won't help us. There is no God. God is punishing us for our sins. We are here to rot and die in the desert. We have become like dry bones."

Narrator, Ezekiel, God, Israel

There was one person left. His name was Ezekiel. The Bible tells us that the Lord took Ezekiel out into death valley and the Lord looked around the desert floor and the Lord asked Ezekiel:

"Shall all these white bones (circle 360 degrees) covering the desert floor live again?"

And Ezekiel wisely replied, "Only you know, Lord if those bones shall live again."

And the Lord God said softly and then louder, with all the gusto of God, “Dem bones, dem bones, are gunna walk around. Dem bones, dem bones are gunna walk around, dem bones, dem bones are gunna walk around. Now YOU hear the Word of the Lord.”

Then the Lord God breathed the Breath of Life into those dead bones.

**“De toe bone connected to the ankle bone;
De ankle bone connected to the foot bone;
De foot bone connected to the shin bone;
De shin bone connected to the knee bone;
De knee bone connected to the thigh bone;
De thigh bone connected to the hip bone;
De hip bone connected to the back bone;
De back bone connected to the neck bone;
De neck bone connected to the head bone;
Now hear da Word of the Word.”**

“Dem bones dem bones are gunna dance around. Dem bones, dem bones are gunna dance around.”

When Israel was at the very bottom and they were most depressed, they heard the Word of the Lord. “Dem bones are gunna rise again.” The nation of Israel would come back to life again.

Voice 2

Today, the question is still asked: “Can God make skeletons dance?” It is from Ezekiel, chapter 37. A most important question that you need to answer today is: “Can God make the skeleton of your life dance?” Today, I would like to suggest to you a basic thesis: that the very essence of God is to take what is dead and make it alive again.

Voice 3

When the bones were dead in the desert, the prophet Ezekiel called out to God and the four winds. To the Breath of God, the Son of man, he said, “God, come from the four winds, Breath of God, come into me and make me alive again.”

It is the Breath of God who comes into your life that makes you alive. Yes, the breath of God, the living water, the living Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, his words, his thoughts, his presence, his attitudes, the very breath and life of God. What does that mean?

There are four parts to us as human beings. First, we all have a physical body. Our physical body has parts, works and moves. Second, we all have a brain. We have smarts, intelligence, gray cellular matter in the cranium. Human beings are far the most intelligent of all the species here on earth. Third, we all have emotions, feelings, and passions, feelings that sing to the highest and drop down to the lowest. And the fourth part of human beings is the most important part of you: the Spirit. Every human being has a spirit inside. All cultures of the world have a religion and temples that symbolize the spiritual realm of life. And we pray, “Breath of God, come into my Spirit.”

When the Spirit of God comes into your spirit, it starts affecting your mind and the way you are thinking about whatever situation you might find yourself in. The Spirit gets into your feelings and the Spirit begins to affect the way you feel. The Spirit gets into your body. God's Spirit gets into your spirit and things begin to change.

It is all in the Spirit of God. It is not something that you do. It is not "trying harder" to make it alive. I am going to try harder, try harder, try harder. The harder you try, often the farther behind you fall. It is a GOD thing, not a YOU thing.

Martin Luther said that it was a passive thing. It is not trying harder. It is just the opposite. It is where you step back, take a deep break, slow down and you ask the Spirit of God to come into your spirit. And the Breath of God breathes into you and asks,

"Can the dead skeleton live again?"

God takes that which is dead and makes it alive.

And the Lord God answers, "Dem bones, dem bones are gunna walk around; Dem bones, dem bones, are gunna walk around; Now, hear de Word of the Lord."

Voice 4

God can take that which is dead and make it alive again. Young people. Teenagers. Young adults. Let's say that you are in junior high school, senior high school, college, young adults. It is possible for a teenager or even a young adult to become dead like a skeleton. Drinking, doping, drugging, messing around, lying to your parents, hanging out with the wrong people. All I know is that young people can become like a pile of bones.

You pray, according to Ezekiel, for the Breath of God. The Breath of God comes into you and begins to live in your life. You have four parts to you. You are made with a body and you have a mind and you have emotions and you have a spirit living inside of you. You pray for the Spirit of God to come inside of you. The Spirit of God enters your mind and affects the way you think about your life. The Spirit of God enters your emotions and affects the way you feel about yourself and others. The Spirit of God enters your physical body and affects your actions and what you do for others and yourself.

It is not something that you do. It is the Spirit living inside of you who changes your life. The Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Divine Spirit slowly permeates all aspects of your life, including your way of your thinking, your way of feeling, and your way of acting. Can God take that which is dead and make it alive? Yes God can.

And the Lord God answers with great power and authority, softly at first and then more loudly, "Dem bones, dem bones are gunna walk around; Dem bones, dem bones, are gunna walk around; Now, hear de Word of the Lord."

Voice 5

God takes that which is dead and makes it alive. I don't know about you, but we can get into a funk every now and then. Do you people ever get down and sometimes depressed? You are down in the dumps and things are not going well and you do not have much energy.

You pray to God the Spirit, that the Breath of God will come from the four winds and will come into your spirit. God's Spirit. Christ's Spirit. The Holy Spirit. The Very Breath of God. God's Spirit in your spirit affects the way you think about yourself, the way you feel about yourself as a human being, the kind of physical energy that you have inside of you. Everything is changed and becomes alive when the Spirit of God, the Breath of God, comes and lives inside of you. Can God take that which is dead and make it alive? Yes God can.

And the Lord God answered with great power and authority, softly at first and then more loudly, "Dem bones, dem bones are gunna walk around; Dem bones, dem bones, are gunna walk around; Now, hear de Word of the Lord."

Voice 6

The last illustration. It has to do with death. At the very end of Ezekiel 37, the passage for today, the Lord God says to the bones in the desert: "Rise." And those bones began to rise.

I want to ask you all a question and I don't want anyone fudging with the answer. Here is the question: "How many of you are going to die? Could I see your hands? (*wait for responses*)Very good." Nobody fudged on that one. Everybody was honest.

We are all going to die. In this next hypothetical question, don't think of cremation. So we are all put into a box. In this analogy, none of us are going to be cremated. We are all going to be put in a coffin. In your imagination, put your dead body into a coffin. Can you imagine yourself dead and now lying in a coffin? Now that coffin has been lowered into the ground. Are you all dead, into the ground, in that box? Pretty soon, the flesh starts to disintegrate. Pretty soon, all that is left of you is your skeleton.

The question is: "Can your skeleton dance again?" That is THE question. Can God make the skeleton of your body dance? That is THE big question of life?

Another basic question this: "What did you do to make your skeleton dance?" There you are in your coffin. You are a skeleton. And your skeleton starts dancing. What did you do to make your skeleton dance?"

Nothing!!!

It is a fundamental principle that goes way back.

When your kids are struggling. When you are down and depressed. It isn't really anything that you do that makes life come again. It is God's miraculous presence who brings new life to the deadness in you and me.

You pray that the Spirit of God will come and breathe life inside of you. God's Spirit. Jesus' Spirit. The Holy Spirit. When your physical skeleton is dead, the Breath of God, from the four winds comes inside of you and slowly....slowly...slowly... Muscles begin to grow on the skeleton and then flesh and then skin.

In the year 587 BCE, the Lord God looked around the desert and the desert floor. There were skeletons all around, all around for three hundred and sixty degrees. Nothing but skeletons, as far as the eye could see. God looked all around and all that God saw was skeletons. And the Sovereign Lord said, "Ezekiel, pray for the Breath of God to come." And Ezekiel prayed, "Breath of God, come on these dead bodies" and all those dead bodies started to breathe. And

started to move. And pretty soon all of them were twiggling and wiggling and jiggling and dancing again.

And the Lord God spoke with great authority and clarity and said :

**“Dem bones, dem bones are gunna walk around,
Dem bones , dem bones are gunna walk around,
Dem bones, dem bones are gunna walk around,
Now hear the Word of the Lord.**

Amen.

The praise song is: “The Lord of the Dance.” Have all the youth of the church come forward and lead the congregation in the praise song, “The Lord of the Dance.” Have the kids do “their” jig on the chorus.

CHILDREN’S SERMON. Have a person who knows CPR come forward and demonstrate CPR. Do CPR on a person who had hypothetically died, breathing into that “dead” person the breath of life. The “dead person” was receiving the breath of life. The breath of life was a pure gift to him. The “dead person” did nothing to receive the Breath of life. So it is when God’s Spirit comes to breathe life into us.

Call to Worship: 8:30a.m.

L: The Spirit of God has brought us here.

P: **The Lord has set us down here, though our bones are tired.**

L: Can these dry bones live?

P: **Yes! The Breath of God will revive us! The Word of God will awaken us!**

L: Today, we come together to experience new life.

ALL: Let us give thanks to the Wild, Life-Giving Spirit of God!