

A Reflection for St David's and St Michael's, Exeter from Howard Friend

Ezekiel 37 vs 1 – 14, Rom 6 vs 6-16, John 11 1-44

I want to concentrate on the Old Testament reading this morning. It is, I think, very relevant to our current situation.

As the old song goes – It's

DEM BONES, DEM BONES, DEM DRI-Y BONES

The language of bones seems right just now - during this crisis. After all - bones get fractured and dislocated - and ground to dust. And that's pretty much how all of us are feeling today. We feel threatened, out of control, afraid of the future. Our routines have gone, we can't see our families - or at least - if we can see them on social media - we can't touch them and we want and miss all of that. Some of us have lost our jobs, probably more of us will - and if predictions are correct some of us will lose our lives. It's not good - we are suffering, and to cap it all - our anxieties are making us ill. There seems little cause for hope.

No HOPE - that's how the Israelites felt - exiled in Babylon, which is the context of Ezekiel ch 37 – torn away from their homeland, slaves to foreigners. Experiencing social / psychological and spiritual fracturing and dislocation and being ground down in some ways just like us - although it would be more accurate to say our 'exile' is self – isolation.

In their desperation they cried out to God

Vs 11 "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off."

Interesting isn't it how that cry reaches down the centuries and seems to summarise our present predicament.

God answered their prayers of Lament with this wonderful picture conveyed through the prophet (Ezekiel) of a Valley of Dry Bones coming back to life. God reconstructed the body and breathed his spirit into that body so that it came alive again.

For the Israelites this picture meant they would get back to their homeland again, they would once more be able to worship God in his Temple there in Jerusalem. There was hope.

They would never forget their time of exile, not all of them did return of course - and things were never quite the same again in that homeland.

But it's important to note:

They cried to God in their suffering and he gave them hope.

VS 14 - I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land.

All very well for the Israelites you say – but what does this Scripture mean for us?

I suggest that the appropriate first response to this crisis for us as churches in Exeter is to rediscover the tradition of Lament. Crying out to God as the Israelites did and as the Psalms show us time and again to:

To Protest

To Petition

To affirm our Faith in God.

(This is one way of defining Lament)

David Runcorn in his excellent book 'The Language of Tears' describes Lament as the 'Particular response of faith in the presence of human pain and perplexity. He goes on to say 'Lament includes a protest and refusal to tolerate or submit to what is going on in the name of humanity or God.'

It is a way of being active, faithful and responsible in the midst of what is happening around us, this suffering.'

We need to turn to Lament today as we face this crisis.

Our world is fractured and dislocated. We recognise that and can therefore 'Weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn'.

As well as lamenting, we, the Body of Christ need to reach out to others: in our church community and in our neighbourhoods - petitioning God for help and being prepared to be that help in the name of Christ.

This crisis offers us a great challenge, an opportunity if you like, to show the love of God to others - to breathe new life into the broken bones of our world and help to make it a living wholesome body again.

Let's face it you can learn a lot from bones.

DEM BONES, DEM BONES, DEM DRI—Y BONES