

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David Powers
Sunday, September 27, 2026

Before we read and hear God's word, let us go to God in prayer. Let's get comfy in our pews. And let us share some breath together. Let's take a deep breath in.

And breathe it out slowly.

Another deep breath in.

And breathe it out slowly.

Breathe in God's mercies.

And breathe out God's mercies to others.

Breathe in God's mercies.

And breathe out God's mercies to others.

Gracious spirit, gracious Ruach, you are as close to us as our very next breath. And so we pray that we would be attentive to your presence within us and around us in these moments. That by your power you would quiet any voice within us by your own that we might hear your word for us this day. And that in hearing, we might be called to lead lives of response. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Our scripture lesson comes to us from the book of Ezekiel. We are in the 37th chapter. We're going to read verses 1 through 14 together. We try to put the page numbers for your pew Bible in our bulletins so you can follow along either in written word or in spoken word this morning. Let's listen for God's word to each of us and indeed to the church.

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. And there were many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "Oh Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Oh 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. And then God said to me, "Prophecy to the breath. Prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God, come from the four winds, oh breath,

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and breathe upon these slain that they may live." I prophesied as God commanded me, and the breath came into them and they lived and stood there on their own feet, a vast multitude. Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. The house of Israel says, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is lost and 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, oh 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, oh my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live. And I will place you on your own soil, and then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act."

The grass withers, and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

So, Ezekiel is prophesying during the Babylonian exile. The northern and southern kingdoms have been displaced from their homeland.

And so, this vision comes to him during that time, when the people of God have been removed from the place that they know to be home and have had to come to dwell in some other place.

The valley, then, becomes an illustration for Ezekiel, for the prophet. Ezekiel has a vision. God meets him in a dry valley, and he is walking around. Walking around and finding bones all over the place, strewn everywhere, dry. The scripture wants us to know that everything is really dried up.

The valley is a place, then, of disconnection, quite literally of the bones in the vision, but more so of the people from their place. The people are disconnected from their place and, they believe, also from their God. So then the valley becomes a place of hopelessness. Not just for themselves, which it certainly is, but for their children and indeed for all God's creation. The valley is the entry point for the people of God to look upon the situation that they have found themselves in. Desperate, disconnected, hopeless, full of fear.

So then as we read the text, the vision of Ezekiel invites us this morning to imagine the valleys of our world. To imagine valleys both personally and communally. To do that, to conjure up the image of a valley in your life, I'd invite you to contemplate where you feel disconnected right now.

Where do you feel hopeless right now? Where do you feel fearful right now? Maybe it's something going on at work or maybe it's at home, maybe it's at school, maybe it's a relationship. Maybe it's part of your health journey right now; maybe even the valley is your spiritual life, your Christian walk. Or maybe it's your journey with sobriety that feels darker than normal. Where do you feel disconnected? Where do you feel hopeless? Where do you feel fear? Whatever image comes to your mind, that is your valley. Personally. But there's also

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valleys that are communal. It is not difficult to look upon the world and to see places of disconnection in it. To look upon our city and our country and the world and to see places of hopelessness. To look upon our world and to see places where fear has manifested. It has disconnected us from each other and from our God.

The valley, personally and communally, is the place of disconnection and hopelessness. It was for Ezekiel. It was for the Israelites. So, that's the setting. But that's not the core of the story. I would posit to you that the core of the story begins in verse three. When God asks Ezekiel, "Mortal, can these bones live?" Looking out upon the desolation of the valley, countless bones that are dried up, "Can these bones live?" That is the question on which the entirety of the story hinges. Everything hinges really on Ezekiel's answer to that question. But like a good, faithful, religious leader that Ezekiel was, he doesn't answer the question. Instead, he simply falls back into trusting God. "Oh Lord God, you know."

I like to use my holy imagination to think that as Ezekiel is being walked through that valley by his God and he's asked this question, "Can these bones live?" under his breath, he's saying, "I don't think so. But oh Lord God, you know."

Turns out that that's enough of a response. It's good enough for God. So, God calls Ezekiel, instructs him, actually, "Prophesy." God says. "Prophesy first to the bones and they will come together." And he does and they do. There's a loud noise and a rattling, and inexplicably they come together, each to the other, bone to bone. The thing that has felt dead and dried up begins to be reconnected in a way that very soon the story is going to bring new life. And the way the scripture tells it, those bones come upon each other and sinews and then skin, and there is a great multitude standing in the valley, but they do not have life yet. They are zombies staring at the prophet.

So, there's a second call to breathe life into those bones. To prophesy to the four winds and to give that valley a life that could not have been expected a few moments ago. And so, Ezekiel does prophesy to the winds and they do draw forth and they come, and every time you read in Ezekiel 37 of wind and of spirit, the Hebrew word is Ruach.

And all of a sudden the Ruach of God inhabits this multitude, and they are alive.

And God interprets the scene for Ezekiel. He doesn't ask him any more questions. He says, "These are my people. You think I'm showing you a valley of bones, but in reality these are simply my people, the people of Israel. They think that they've been cut off, they think they've been disconnected, they think they have no hope. They are full of fear. And you need to go and speak to them. And you need to tell them that the same thing that happened in this valley is going to happen with them. That the places where they feel most disconnected are going to be

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reconnected. The places where they are most hopeless will be infused with hope. The places where they think death has the final word, they will be a word of life."

"There will be a word of life." Prophecy is not contingent upon anything. God doesn't say, "I might do this." God says, "I am going to do this. And in fact, you will know I am God when I do this, not if."

So, the question then that the Ruach asks of us this morning is do we believe that new life can come to that valley? Can those bones live for us this day? Not just communally, but personally. Whatever your valley is, do you believe that new life is actually possible in that relationship? That thing that's going on at work. In your spiritual journey. In your parenting. In your partnership. Do you believe that new life is actually possible? Because I would tell you that I think more often than not, it is not our reliance on God's power that is the problem. It is our willingness to believe that God's power can be present in the most hopeless place, the deepest darkest valley in our lives.

Do you believe that God can bring life to the place where you feel most disconnected, most hopeless, most full of fear? It's the question that Ruach asks of us this day. For those who call upon the name of Jesus, the good news of the gospel is that God is still in the business of sending wind and sending breath and sending spirit to bring about new life. In the Gospel of John, the 14th chapter, the 26th verse, Jesus is telling his disciples he is about to leave them. They are about to feel disconnected, abandoned, hopeless, but he says to them in verse 26, "But the advocate, the Holy Spirit," (which in Greek is pneuma. But it is exactly the same translation as Ruach.) "The advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." Jesus promises that the breath, the wind, the spirit of God will fall upon them and indeed dwell within them. And the promise for the followers of Jesus in that day is the same promise for us this day. That the breath and the wind and the spirit that moved across that dry valley and then later was sent as an advocate for God's people, that same Ruach, that same pneuma is still bringing forth life from every darkened valley.

Each of these words is supposed to call us forth in something. I think this week it's particularly poignant for us because I don't know what valley you are navigating right now. I don't know what's made it dark, what has made it hopeless, what makes you feel disconnected in it. But what I do know is that the good news of the gospel is that there is still a God who's in the business of sending spirit and wind to enliven what feels dried up and dead and beyond repair. Whatever it is, in your work, in your family, in your personal life, whatever that valley is this day, the spirit of God is still moving over it.

God's not even worried about whether we believe new life can come from that valley.

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God's already working in it.

You might say though that “Preacher, I'm not in a valley this morning. It is 80° outside and there's no humidity and we are in the fall and I am loving life right now. I don't know what you're talking about with the valley.” Here's what I would say your calling is from the text this morning. Your calling is the calling of Ezekiel. Because the point of the story wasn't for him to have this grand vision, it was for him to communicate to those whom he loved, who were walking through their own valley, that the same God, the same God that worked in the vision of that valley was working in their lives as well. So, it might be that God has positioned you closely to someone who was walking in the midst of a really dark valley right now. Maybe it's grief, maybe it's hurt, maybe it's fear, maybe it's pain. If that's the case this morning and you find yourself able to walk amongst the dry bones unaffected, I would tell you your calling as a follower of Christ is to walk alongside someone in their valley and say, “Life can come from this. Repair can come to this place. It feels really disconnected right now, but the spirit of God is still present here. Drawing bones back together. And there will be a day when you're going to stand on your feet again. A great multitude and you're going to walk out this valley full of a new life that you couldn't have imagined.”

If you're in your valley, you need to know that the Ruach of God is still moving, and if you're walking alongside someone in their valley, you need to be the one who is the mouthpiece of Ruach. Whatever valley you're navigating this morning, whatever valley you see in our world, whatever valley you are navigating with someone else, I want you to know that the disconnection and the hopelessness and the fear of that place do not have the final word. The same God who walked the valley with Ezekiel walks with you today. The same spirit that Jesus promised would dwell within the faithful dwells within you today. The Ruach of God is still at work, still redeeming, still bringing life.

God is as close as our very next breath.

So with each breath, may we be reminded of the transformative, redeeming grace of our God. With every breath this week, may you be reminded that the final word of our God is one of life and of hope and of connection.

Let's pray for attentiveness to that this week. Let's pray together.

God, you know our valleys even better than we do. And we see bones strewn across. We don't know how they even got there. But you know everything about the difficulty of that place. What we pray for, Lord, is that as we walk that, as we navigate those valleys this week, we might never lose hope that your spirit is still at work bringing possibility and redemption and renewal.

If you are positioning us to walk alongside another through their valley, we just pray that you would give us the right words to speak and the wisdom to remain silent with them as we walk

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with them. Help us in the ways that you enable us by the power of your spirit, help us to speak words of promise and of hope.

God, we see a vision in our world of brokenness and of despair, and yet we worship you and so we know that vision is not the final one. We pray that you might make our church a greater instrument of your reconnection, of your renewal, of your hopefulness for the world. Help each of our ministries and each of our members to be about the work of sharing your life-giving spirit.

For we ask it in the name of the one who promised to send an advocate, a spirit to dwell amongst us and within us, Jesus the Christ. Amen.