

**When the Road Takes an Unexpected Turn** Psalm 130; Ezekiel 37:1-14  
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston WV 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent (April 6) 2014

Psalm 130

<sup>1</sup> Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!  
<sup>2</sup> O Lord, hear my voice!  
 Let your ears be attentive  
 to the voice of my pleas for mercy!  
<sup>3</sup> If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,  
 O Lord, who could stand?  
<sup>4</sup> But with you there is forgiveness,  
 that you may be feared.  
<sup>5</sup> I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,  
 and in his word I hope;  
<sup>6</sup> my soul waits for the Lord  
 more than watchmen for the morning,  
 more than watchmen for the morning.  
<sup>7</sup> O Israel, hope in the LORD!  
 For with the LORD there is steadfast love,  
 and with him is plentiful redemption.  
<sup>8</sup> And he will redeem Israel  
 from all his iniquities.

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley;<sup>[a]</sup> it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. <sup>3</sup> And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." <sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. <sup>5</sup> Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath<sup>[b]</sup> to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup> And I will lay sinews upon 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."

<sup>7</sup> So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling,<sup>[c]</sup> and the bones came together, bone to its bone. <sup>8</sup> And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. <sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." <sup>10</sup> So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

<sup>11</sup> Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' <sup>12</sup> Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup> And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD."

**Don works ten hours a day in a well paid job. He keeps up a beautiful home. Every night, he eats dinner with his wife and puts his daughter to bed. He has been a good financial planner and has worked hard to make sure he has financial security, a good pension plan to prepare for retirement, and an excellent health insurance package.**

He belongs to a civic club, a church, and a health club. He attends all the home and away games of the local university sports team. He has a lot going on. But every morning he curses his alarm clock for making him face the day. He wonders why.

One Saturday he gets an answer. He is walking downtown and practically has to step over a drunk lying on the sidewalk. About the same time he spots a 13 year old boy he knows.

"What's happening?" the boy asks.

"Nothing," Don replies.

Then he hears the voice of the drunk behind him: "Yea, me too."

How terrible, when **NOTHING** is happening. We have always heard life is a great gift. But sometimes Don does not think so. His days are drudgery, and he wants to do what he can to get through them. His life is busy and when he has spare time, he looks for ways to "KILL TIME." What he wants to do is escape. His life STINKS.

But I did tell you Don belongs to a church, didn't I? Church is one of his trivialities. Church is where he can eat the bread, drink the grape juice, and think about being rescued from his life, and especially from his death. Church is where Don can hear his favorite verses of scripture. He loves the passages which reinforce his belief that if you keep your nose clean, do what is expected, and keep your doctrine straight, you'll make it...whatever making it means in the Christian scheme of things—some kind of escape after death, some kind of joy found in the hereafter not found in the here and now. Religion can help pass the time, get through this life of little meaning. If you are the right kind of Christian you don't have to face up to the trivialities of your life.

But you do have to be tricky. One trick Don uses to keep from getting too uncomfortable in his faith is not to study the Bible too much. For a good scrutiny would uncover some passages which would disturb him even more than the drunk on the sidewalk.

For example, if Don were to really encounter Psalm 130 (as we have through the Call to Worship and the Anthem) ... **“Out of the depths, I cry, O Lord ...”** Don might have to ask himself the question:

Are those **“depths” from which my soul cries out to God some geopgrahpical place along the way**, or are those **“depths” from which my soul cries out to God a perpetual condition of my soul, one of quiet desperation.**

In our midterm exam last week, we looked at the notion of MASKS that so many people wear each day ... some masks we are so comfortable wearing that we don't even realize what is the truth anymore ... some masks we are so comfortable wearing, that to peel them away and to stand naked before God requires fear and trembling. Some of those masks we wear to prevent us from seeing what we are missing in our lives.

And then, sometimes along the way, the road takes an unexpected turn and we fall into a hole.

And, sometimes along the way, the road takes an unexpected turn and we encounter circumstances that our faith is not prepared to deal with.

And, sometimes along the way we realize that we have been hiding our eyes from seeing that much of our life is a valley of dry bones – dry without life, but covered up with all kinds of attempts at making those dry bones pretty.

My sisters and brothers, it doesn't matter how pretty we make a valley of dry bones ... if the Breath of God is not in them, they are still only a PRETTY valley of dry, dead, lifeless bones, seeking escape into some life hereafter ... but afraid to claim the real vitality of life in the here and now.

This journey of Lent is not merely about a physical journey, nor just a journey through the pages of a daily calendar. It's about a FAITH journey.

We can claim a **BELIEF** in the love of God, through Jesus. But what we need is **FAITH**.

One day, a crowd stood in awestruck wonder as they watched the man pushing a wheelbarrow on a tightrope over Niagra Falls. When he arrived at the other side, the crowd applauded. He asked, ***“Do you believe that I can turn around and push this wheelbarrow back to the other side?”*** The crowd roared, ***“Yes, we believe!”*** He stood there quietly, waiting for the crowd to quiet down, and then he said, ***“Who wants to ride in the wheelbarrow?”***

THAT, my sisters and brothers is the difference between BELIEF and FAITH.

Don't beat yourself up. Faith is a gift. Even the great John Wesley, in his early days of ministry, knew that he did not have real faith; only a doctrinal belief. And he was advised by the Moravian leader, ***“Preach faith until you get it; then preach faith because you have it.”***

Sometimes, along the journey of life, life takes an unexpected turn, and we will fall into a great hole. Out of the depths will we call unto God. Sometimes it takes a hole just such as this to understand that we have been far too content in a prettified valley of dry bones along the way.

LIFE ... real Spirit filled life ... is not hoping for an escape card when we die.

LIFE ... real Spirit filled life ... is in the NOW. It takes FAITH.

Do you have it?

Does it show?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.