

“What’s Next?” (Ezekiel 37:1-14 John 11:38-44)

A sermon by Rev. Dan Yeazel – May 25, 2025

I thought I’d start with a little math this morning, it’s kind of a story problem, 28 years ago this month, I turned 32 years old. So, how old am I now? 60! That’s right. Now also 28 years ago this month, Dale Heights celebrated an Anniversary. Anyone remember which anniversary that was? The 40th! I found a dusty old sermon from that occasion, and I thought I’d start by quoting from that message.

“LORDY, LORDY LOOK WHOSE FORTY!” That has been the “unofficial” theme of our anniversary preparations. I’m not sure if it is out of astonishment, relief, bewilderment, joy, or all of the above. But here we are at forty years from our founding. Now, I’ve not yet seen forty-(remember I was 32 at that point), people who have made it to 40, tell me it’s nice. People who have been there twice, or made it to 80, tell me it is great, and I have yet to meet anyone who has seen forty “three times” around. But I hope we all get there. I hope Dale Heights gets there.

Just before the 40th anniversary, we created our mission statement “We are an open and accepting fellowship of Christian believers, expressing love by caring for and committing ourselves to each other, our community and the world.” That is a glimpse of God’s love.

(Again, this was 1997) I have been here less than a year, yet I would like to share some of the ways I have seen this Christian love, this caring and commitment reflected in our congregation. Time will not allow for me to offer all the examples I would like, to name everyone in the Dale Heights family. But there have been some wonderful stories I’ve heard and examples I would like to share.

What does the love of Christ look like? It looks like Cy Owen offering an arm to Ed Schneberger as they both walk to lunch together. It looks like Edi and Keith Chan taking pictures at all our events to help us remember. It looks like Janice Krall and Crystal Sargent working with the children for a Christmas Pageant, or youth led service. It looks like Trudi Gebhardt greeting you at the door. It looks like Marty Smith weeding the rock garden so that everyone may enjoy it. It looks like Buelah Lyngaas offering her kitchen bowl almost 40 years ago, to have the first baptism here in the church. (I believe it was Ed’s.) It looks like Dede Mayberry speaking out for Social Justice, it looks like Dora and everyone involved with New Beginnings. It looks like Dick Corey and Sandy Weigt, who have both given of themselves in so many ways to make this place go. It looks like each one of us, as we think about others and act in kindness toward them. (hold up mirror)//

In our two reading this morning, we have two powerful stories of God's presence bringing life. With Ezekiel's vision and Mary and Martha's miracle, we enter places where despair had taken hold and yet grace breaks forth. I'd like to consider both passages this morning because they each present a profound picture of God's grace in the midst of uncertain or hopeless situations. They are both stories of transformation that give us hope no matter what our situation.

In the Old Testament, Ezekiel has a dramatic vision of the Spirit flowing through him, and lives being changed in the greatest way possible. As the Lord's hand is upon him, he is having a long look at a stark place where nothing happens. He is looking at a valley filled with death and stillness. The text says the Spirit leads him here to have a good look around. What he sees in a place where there is no movement, no life, no hope. In his vision he is told that these are the remains of the whole house of Israel.

God first shows him this desperate and desolate place and asks the question of him; can these bones live? Is there any hope? Do these people have a future? Responding in a very smart way he says. "O God - **you** know!"

These are people of God. And the change begins to take place, the spirit begins to act, when God takes Ezekiel to this barren place and says to him -"Prophesy!" Go there and speak of hope, and speak of the future. Go - preach, speak to these bones, God says. Go to this barren place declaring that the Spirit will be put within you and you will live! Tell them! He does - and something happens, noise, rattling, signs of something changing. But it isn't all at once. It happens in stages. God then tells Ezekiel to call to the spirit to breathe upon these people just out of their graves so that they become alive. Again, things happened just as God said they would.

God calls to Ezekiel to "prophesy" three times and we see a movement of God's breath, God's Spirit going through Ezekiel recreating this place of bareness, to a place teeming with life. God is using Ezekiel as a human wind instrument to carry the Spirit. With his first words the bones find each other and take shape once more. You know the "knee bone is connected to the leg bone". This is where that song came from. The bodies are re-formed. But they are not breathing. The next words from Ezekiel bring breath, and sure signs of life. But that is not all of it.

The people are on their feet, yet they call out they are cut off, saying our hope is lost. Once again God says to Ezekiel declare to them the truth that they are not lost, God will

bring all back and they will come to a place that is theirs. God says I have spoken and I will act. Tell them there is hope, all is not lost. They have a future out there with their name on it. There is something more to come. Tell them!

Notice that what we see is the Spirit of God working through human intervention. God gave Ezekiel the words, and the commandment to speak, but it is the voice of Ezekiel that is heard. There is this incredible intermingling divine and human activity. The spirit flows into Ezekiel and through him to all these others with promise and hope that no matter how lost, or desperate, or dead they may be, they are not lost from God. God will act and we will know the Lord.

As a community of faith we are to play a prophetic role, declaring and demonstrating that none of God's people are lost or beyond reach. The breath of God never stops. The wind of the Holy Spirit is continually in motion causing change to happen and life to renew. The world is filled with people wanting to live once more, all in need of the invitation to live and know that God is God.

As Christians we hear the call to live again from Jesus. When Jesus goes to the Lazarus' tomb with Mary and Martha and tells them to roll back the stone of the grave he challenges them to open up the most painful part of their life to him. He says, in essence, take me to your desert, your valley of dry bones and despair. Take me there. You see, just as true as the fact that sometimes we are in the depths, is the fact that Jesus stands with us in that place, stands with us in front of the tombs we have tried to seal up and shut out of our lives. Jesus stands with us in the most painful of places - and two things are true there:

One, he weeps with us. Which is to say that God is not unaware of the grief and the pain that has come upon us. In Jesus Christ, God stands outside the places where death and sin have done their worst and he weeps with us in our pain. But two, Jesus also brings new life into that place. Jesus calls out in a loud voice...and Lazarus comes out! It is the proof of what he said: Jesus is the resurrection and the life. And what happened this day in Bethany was just a foreshadowing of the celebration over another empty tomb that we remember on Easter morning.

"Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?", Jesus says. Roll back the stone!" And then Martha and Mary do the risky thing. They act on faith, not on what they fear. Against common sense and their better judgment, they don't keep the thing that stinks in life buried or sealed shut. But because he said so, they make the

risky choice, they roll back the stone and let Jesus in. And the result is a miracle. In the place of tears, an outbreak of joy; in the place of fear, faith risks it all, all because of Jesus' promise, "I am the resurrection and the life, believe in me!"

Lazarus is a picture of many Christians today. He has been given new life by Christ but he is still wrapped and bound in the strips of old cloth. He has been raised from the dead but he can't yet walk around. He has experienced a miracle but there is no movement in his life. Looking at Lazarus we see ourselves, we see that something more is needed. He needs help moving out of the place of bondage. And so Jesus says untie him and let him go. As brothers and sisters in faith may we be about the joyful and life-giving task of unbinding others as we are being unbound ourselves.

Amen.