



Passion Sunday Sermon - 29th March 2020 Transcript

Hello everyone.

What strange times we are living through! The whole world is suddenly struggling and there's no way of knowing what comes next, or when it will all end. We are isolated from one another and cut off from everything that is normal in our lives. St. Paul said this a long time ago:

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. (2 Corinthians 4: 8 - 9)"

I hope that you can echo these words, wherever you are!

Let's begin our time together with a prayer - let us pray:

Loving God, you are Lord of space and time, of this whole world, and unimaginable stretches of space beyond.

Your love spans this globe, and your hand is upon each person existing on it just now, whatever their circumstance. With so many nations finding themselves in strange and restricted times, the world seems to have shrunk for us into one family of suffering people. It has always been one world for you who made it and who loves it with a passion.

And so as we meet together in these strange and limiting ways, in these strange and limiting times, we lift our eyes above the smallness of our own circumstances to the greatness of your love, the certainly of your strength, the endless supply of your love, and the immeasurable extent of your peace. Fill us with your hope, and encourage us to look to you, frequently, regularly, often, as we exist through all that is happening. We offer our worship to you this day. Amen

The Message

One of the readings for Passion Sunday is from Ezekiel chapter 37. I suggest you find a Bible, and read the passage to yourself. God shows Ezekiel a vision of a valley of dry bones, and asks him if he thinks these bones can live again? Ezekiel is unsure, but God tells him to speak to the bones, saying: "I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord." Ezekiel speaks and in the vision the bones re-form into living bodies.

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That may seem like a strange story, but knowing the background makes all the difference. A few years before that country of Israel had been invaded, and all the people had been captured. They had been taken to Babylon where they were made to work in the city, Ezekiel was among them. They had lost their homeland, and had no hope of going back. They were a nation that had lost heart. All they could see was the bleached bones of their past history. The present and future held nothing. Many had lost all their faith in God. They were going through the motions of their lives, like a lot of dried up old bones, with nothing to look forward to. Not praying, not living, just existing.

But God spoke to these people through Ezekiel with a message of hope and new possibility "Don't despair! I will give you hope. Trust me and believe in me because I will breathe new life and new hope into you. You will have a future. You will have the life you miss once again." We know that after about 60 years, people were allowed to go back to their own country and to rebuild Jerusalem and its walls. They discovered new hope and new life. All that happened is preserved for us in the Old Testament, particularly in the books of Nehemiah and Ezra.

But getting back to those dry bones for a moment. God says: I will make my breath enter you. The Hebrew word for breath is "ruach", a word with at least two other meanings. The same word is used for the wind, unseen and powerful. More importantly perhaps, the same word is used for God's Spirit. In the context of Ezekiel, God isn't just breathing on the dry bones: he is filling them with his Spirit. God's Spirit does not simply put new breath into those dried up bones. God fills them with his Spirit of life and energy and vision and new possibility. The tragedy of their nation's situation is transformed, by the living Spirit of God blowing new life and new hope into tired, despondent people.

Do you feel tired, despondent, hopeless, lost, perplexed, even despairing? God says to you too, I will breathe my Spirit into you. Don't despair! I will give you hope. Trust me and believe in me because I will breathe new life and new hope into you. You will have a future. You will have the life you miss once again.

The Israelites had to wait 60 years to have their lives restored to their homeland. Hopefully our wait will be rather less than that! But God whose Spirit had the power to transform the dry bones of a nation into a new and living hope, has the power to transform each of us, with patience, with strength, with peace, with purpose, and especially with hope.

Psalm 126

*When the Lord brought back his exiles to Jerusalem, it was like a dream!
We were filled with laughter and we sang for joy.
And the other nations said,
"What amazing things the Lord has done for them."
Yes, the Lord has done amazing things for us! What joy!*

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*Restore our fortunes, Lord, as streams renew the desert.
Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy.
They weep as they go to plant their seed,
but they sing as they return with the harvest.*

May you know hope and peace and real purpose in God's Spirit this Passion Sunday and always. Amen