Ezekiel 37: 1-14 & John 11: 38-44

I know for many of us the question that I am about to ask may appear as something from days gone by – a time of historic memories. But…….when you arranged for a doctor appointment and physically went into the surgery to meet with a doctor in person: Does anyone remember??? Forgive me, I truly value the NHS, but it is a fact that seeing a doctor face to face is not as frequent as it used to be.

For those who remember, did any of them have one of those skeletons hanging in the corner? Or is that only osteopaths that have those? Regardless of the answer, when I recall this passage from Ezekiel, with dry bones gathering together, that is the image that comes to mind.

I know when I read it that is completely the wrong image as it tells us that they did not stand until they had tendons, ligaments and flesh upon them and after breath had been breathed into them – but that is the image that comes to mind. Inaccurate perhaps, but I am being honest.

So, what is the proper view we should get from this passage? It begins, in my opinion a little weird! God speaks to Ezekiel, at a time that the nation of Israel was in exile. To speak hope to him, God takes him to a battlefield where there are hundreds of very, old bones.

Before we go on – the fact that Ezekiel had this encounter with God does not mean that it was a commonplace event. In fact, because it has been recorded means that it was not a common occurrence.

God tells Ezekiel to prophesy over the old, dry bones, to speak the word of God to them. As I say, in my opinion, weird! How would you feel if you had to talk to a load of old bones? Perhaps my husband, Andrew would suggest that at least he could talk to them uninterrupted! But I hope that at least some of you will agree with me – weird.

Ezekiel did exactly what he had been asked and prophesied to the bones. He spoke the promises that God had made to them, that they would be covered once again with tendons, muscle and flesh. And that is exactly what happened.

And it is for their benefit, so that they know that God is LORD.

But they were still inanimate – no life in them at all. God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath, which he does. Once there is breath in them, they all stand, these new people, a vast army standing to attention.

This army represented the nation of Israel. Ezekiel was to prophesy to Israel that God is Lord and bring them hope.

God in the end states “I will put my Spirit in you and you will live”.

Let me make this plain – although God can raise people to life, this newly arisen army was NOT a replacement of the people of Israel who were in exile. This was a vision intended to bring hope to those who were scattered, living in the consequence of God’s judgement on his chosen nation who had turned away from him.

Israelites were feeling rejected and completely lost, separated from their God. Ezekiel had this amazing vision, but he did not keep it to himself, he shared it with the Israelites, it was Ezekiel who delivered the words of God into people’s ears.

What things should we take from this passage? For me, the main points are:

The abandoned bones represented individuals who were no longer in a right relationship with God, they had trusted other people instead. It was their separation from God that made them feel hopeless, a meaningless life.

Ezekiel had to obey what God told him to do. Although God could have simply just done all that he did, he wanted humans to be a part in his action. He wants all of us to believe in what He has promised to each of us.

God is the only one who can put breath into anyone, to give them life-breath. But in this passage He is showing that we need to ask Him to act. It should be a desire – to be alive in God, and allow Him to be alive in us.

The end of the passage tells us specifically that He will put His Spirit into His people – that is us. But we need to ask, and we need to ask because we believe His promise and trust in Him. To know that God is LORD.

Are any of us feeling less than alive today? Then ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit. Come closer into relationship with your heavenly Father.

We then read that passage in John’s gospel. Jesus had gone to his friends’ house, Martha, Mary and Lazarus, after being told that Lazarus had been ill and had died.

Jesus had waited two days before he went there. Yes, we can believe that it was because he was in danger, he had been threatened to be stoned to death recently if he returned. But scripture tells us that it was to ensure that everyone knew Lazarus was dead and not simply “sleeping”.

Jesus is seen weeping and being extremely moved by the loss of his friend. He has a few conversations and then prays to God. It is after prayer that Jesus says “Lazarus, come out”.

The man who has been dead for four days walks out of the grave.

Is this very much different from the dry bones in Ezekiel? I do not think so.

Just as Ezekiel had to speak to the bones before they were raised again, so Jesus had to speak to Lazarus. God had the power to fulfil these acts without the mediation of people – but He chose not to. He wanted everyone to know that Jesus was God’s Son. All that Jesus did was only possible through God.

This emphasises that God WANTS to work with our knowledge. He wants us to SEE His love – to KNOW His love.

But both the army of Ezekiel and Lazarus were raised to earthly life, only to face earthly death once again sometime in the future. So, what is the point of these actions?

We are told in the John passage that Jesus was deeply moved, weeping for Lazarus. Although He had wanted with all his human being to go directly to him, to save everyone from that deep hurt, in order to show the power of God He had to wait. Jesus suffered pain to allow the situation to become an opportunity for God to show Himself in ALL His power.

And when we are told of all those who were mourning Lazarus, could that be a reflection of God mourning any of His children who do not recognise or accept Him, and turn from Him. God suffers loss every time someone denies His Fatherhood.

For those who believe, their life has meaning, and hope. That hope of being with God in this life, and eternally. Lazarus was raised, as well as the army, to face an earthly death again, but all of them, as well as those who saw God in fulness at that time were saved with the promise of eternal life in relationship with God.

I don’t think God wants us to live life as a skeleton, hanging in a corner of a room. He wants us to live a full life with Him, in relationship with Him.

If we ask for the Holy Spirit to continue to dwell within us, to rely upon Him, to trust in Him and pray with Him, then our life with God, through Jesus, the only one to have shown a Resurrection life, will be renewed.

We can live to the fulness that God desires. Allow Him to breathe on us, the breath of God and fill us with His Holy Spirit, continually. Let us arise again, with hope.