

Two of the computers in the parish office network this last week have been out of action for several days, one of them being mine! My attempts to overcome this bereavement from e mails and the web largely proved Einstein's dictum that it is surely madness to keep on doing the same thing expecting a different result. Yet, on Thursday morning as I turned on my computer, sure of that icon informing me of the bad news, my machine, leapt- well, wheezed, into action. Einstein was deprived of the last mad laugh, and the triumph of hope over experience prevailed once again.

But it didn't for the people of Israel, who had been forced, beaten, sold, enslaved into exile. The story

of the Dry Bones- Ezekiel's famous, dream, is a powerful symbol of loss and desiccation, and yet at the same time of hope. For what Ezekiel had been hearing over and over again from his compatriots in exile, is despair as dry as dust, despair as deep as death. As he recounts in this vision 'Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost'. The people are incapable of a vision to rekindle hope. They've lost their last fingertip grasp on God.

It's a great story- 'them bones, them bones, them dry bones, hear the word of the Lord'. In this dream of the valley of dry bones the creative, healing wind of God is experienced binding up, bone to bone, sinew to sinew. And the culmination of the story is of course, God's breathing of life into the people once again- and it's the same word, the same

concept, insufflation, which recurs time and again in the scriptures. It's the same breathing as God does into Creation in Genesis, the same breathing that Jesus makes upon his disciples in the Upper room after the resurrection, the same breathing of life by the Spirit at Pentecost, for which we wait. And this breath, is not from some holy oxygen tank, but God is breathing **himself** into creation, into the dry bones, into the disciples, into the whole people of God at Pentecost. In orthodox churches at Baptism, the priest still breathes into the nostrils of those to be baptised, as a visual aid, that it is **God** who gives life, it is the breath of **God** which enables the baptised to live in and for God, because God is in them. The total absence of hope and life, which

the exiles experienced is to be remedied by God's gift of his own presence, which is life.

And so too in this Gospel reading- strangely for Eastertide it is set at the Last Supper- Jesus is, rather tediously, explaining to his friends that he must leave them, yet will still be with them. With them, whenever they attempt to live his way, to stay faithful to what they have experienced and learnt of divine love in human context, with them in the in their faithfulness as they attempt to make God present and known, to incarnate God in their own living, and with them as they meet to take bread and wine 'in remembrance of me'.

So we've got something of a circular- or perhaps, a spiral, argument here. God asks the followers of Jesus to continue to make him known- through

their thoughts, their words, their actions, their engagement with those outside the church, as Jesus has done throughout his ministry, and at the same time, he is giving us his own life and presence, his breath, to make that possible. Time and again we come to realise that we are being asked to do and to give what God himself has already done and given. To breathe new life, to rekindle hope, to incarnate a new way of living and being in community. We are promised forgiveness- **and** we are asked to forgive, shown love **and** asked to give love, we are given God in our baptism **and** asked to make a home for God in us. Yet, our dry bones don't have to make this new life, forge out on their own path, hobbling along in a new way; no, our

pathetic dry bones have the possibility of life , hope being breathed into them.

For the disciples at the Last Supper, when Jesus tried to tell them straight, that the incarnating of love is now their role, it must have seemed like the events of Good Friday, Holy Saturday, even Easter Day, were as desolate as that valley of dry bones- and yet we also know that the promise of new life did somehow percolate even their sinews. Soon, we celebrate Pentecost, the outpouring of that same breath of God into the lives of believers, of every race and language, gathered in Jerusalem, a message prefigured in today's Gospel, 'The Advocate, the Holy Spirit will come and lead you into all truth'. And we see it in the Acts of the Apostles reading too as the growing church, the

risen body of Christ has already leapt from Jerusalem and the Middle East into Greece and Europe, and inclusive in gender too, as Lydia, a woman of substance, a worshipper of God, welcomes Paul and is baptised with her household and other women.

And we can see it too in our world, when we look—some of you will know that Ramani and I have just returned from Sri Lanka, R's country of origin and a country I've grown to love over 40 years and more. But it is also a country which has been bled dry by a corrupt ruling dynastic family, which when Covid and the collapse of tourism hit, had, literally, no financial reserves, the currency has sunk without trace. There is no fuel, no gas to cook with, endless electricity cuts, very little medication available and

food at astronomically high prices now, such that people are not eating, not daring to go to a doctor, schools shut, - and yet there have been, for the last two months, peaceful protests from across society. For the first time there is no hint of ethnic divide, a cancer which has bedevilled the country for 50 years- no, the peaceful protest camps are remarkable outpourings of hope, by rich and poor, old and young, Sinhalese,. Tamil, Muslim, male and female, a vision of hope that the old ways, the dry bones of elite entitlement, of endemic political corruption are not the way forward. Where else might we see the hope of the new- look, pray, act, for, the risen Christ, God's gift of himself, through and beyond even betrayal and death, brings hope

out of despair, light out of darkness, life out of dry bones. Look and see, act and speak...for

‘I have told you all this’ says Jesus ‘so that when it occurs you may believe’.

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