

LIFE IN A DRY VALLEY AND KNOWING LIFE & PEACE

Ezekial 37:1-14 & Romans 8:6-11

Balloons can be great fun! balloons are used for so many things in many contexts. Balloons are great to throw and catch, use for decorations, and even make our hair stand up with static electricity! They name a place where an event is happening, they come all shapes, sizes and colours. However, balloons aren't much good if they don't have any air inside them – just like this one!

What can you do with an uninflated balloon like this one? Not much!

What do we need to do to make this balloon full of life?

We need to fill it with breath. When balloons are full, they're fun and games, bouncy, full of life, unpredictable, interactive. They have the capacity to bring about the sounds of laughter and creative imagination.

And what about a balloon that has lost its air? Limp, lifeless, a bit sad, no happy face there.

In the 6th century BCE the prophet Ezekiel was with his people in a strange land, a long way away from his home. They felt tired, discouraged, and a bit like those flat balloons; without much hope or energy.

In a dream-like vision, Ezekiel saw a valley full of dry bones, an image of how his people were feeling. In the vision, a message of hope came to him: that the breath of God's Spirit could bring life again, even to the driest places. Ezekiel imagined the breathing wind blowing through that valley, filling those bones with new life; just like a breath fills a balloon.

He must have been quite the orator because through him the people came to believe that, even far from home, God's Spirit was still with them, bringing comfort, courage, and the promise of a future.

Before hearing this message, the people felt like deflated balloons. Afterwards, they felt filled again, full of hope, energy, and the possibility of new life.

- I wonder how we might help one another feel filled with life again.
- I wonder what new spiritual life God might be breathing into us even in places that feel like the dry old bones of ageing in our lives where the weariness of just living each day seems to dominate our woken hours. It's a never-ending search for life of peace, love, grace, and hope in the light of Christ.

Paul reminds us that if our minds are ruled by the Spirit, we will know both life and peace. How true this can be for us today, as we walk in the light of Christ's love, and as we face the valleys and deserts of our lives. In Matthew 5 the Sermon on the Mount begins with blessing and invites us into a different kind of inner economy. Quite different because it's not based on money, or by anxiety of wealth and status or even self-reliant strength, but by the Spirit who breathes life into what is otherwise dead. When our thoughts line up with the Spirit, our minds become a workshop for life: a place where truth dispels fear, where patience calms worry, and where grace becomes foundational in our journey towards our longing to be reconciled with God, others, and ourselves.

Christ's love stands at the centre of this transformation. His love isn't a distant sentiment but a practical force that moves towards us in mercy and nearness where our trust in Christ is an important part of the equation. The love of Christ is our invitation to see others with the compassion that Jesus showed: stopping with the wounded, feeding the hungry, forgiving the offender, and placing hope about despair. This love rearranges our priorities and redirects our energy from the self-protection to self-giving. Making ourselves vulnerable to the consequences of others. When we've allowed ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit, love becomes second nature in our actions the fuel for our courage to pursue what is right. It's also the stop sign for seeking any form of revenge, resentment, and the grace that pardons when we're quick to judge. When our mouth is engaged to speak before our minds and ears have had the opportunity to step in and save us from ourselves.

Compassion becomes more than a feeling; it becomes a way of life that shapes our decisions, how we treat others when under stress, our response to failure in either ourselves or others, and

how we endure hardship without losing our humanity. The Spirit teaches us to grieve rightly (not in denial, but with hope) and to persevere with a gently steadfastness. In this atmosphere of Spirit-led living, hope isn't a warranty for easy outcomes but a confident expectation that Christ's redemptive work is moving everything in the direction of goodness right where he intended it to be. Hope looks beyond the brokenness of today and directs us towards a future where God's purposes prevail and where love, justice, and peace will be complete.

Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones speaks powerfully into this reality. Ezekiel offers us an image of lifelessness, where bones lie scattered, a nation's hope seemingly buried, and breath appears to be absent. Yet God's words to Ezekiel comes with the breath of possibility where all isn't lost: prophesy, and bones will come together; not by human effort alone, but through the Spirit giving life. It's a vivid image of what the Spirit can accomplish in a deadened, exhausted, or perhaps despairing world and within us. The dry bones symbolise those areas of our lives where vitality seems depleted: broken relationships, shattered plans, grief unyielding, faith tested, and dreams deferred for another day or time. The Spirit's invitation isn't to pretend life can come from our own strength but to invite God to breath anew.

Paul's words promise life and peace to those whose minds are Spirit led. Ezekiel's valley reminds us that dead things can be re-knit through God's continuous activity in God's created earth. Christ's love, compassion, and grace, and our trust in God's promises are the channels through which resurrection happens; in us and through us, to a world longing for healing. As we live with this Spirit-led orientation, we become people filled with hope: we speak life into dry places, offer forgiveness where bitterness has taken root, extend grace when judgement would be easier, and hold fast to the future God has promised. In such living, the mind is renewed, the heart is strengthened, and the world begins to glimpse the new thing God is doing—a present life that anticipates the fullness of the life to come.

So, I ask how might we help one another to feel filled with life again like this balloon?

Let us pray: Lord, today we choose to set our mind on your Spirit, not on fear or worries. Help us to live the life you promise, a life of peace that passes understanding. Thank you for living within our hearts through your Spirit, for giving life to our mortal frame. Remind us that you raised Jesus, and by your Spirit you awaken our hearts and renew our strength. May we always walk in hope, victory, and eternal love today. In your blessed name amen.