

Good morning! When I initially read Ezekial 37 I thought more of Halloween than I did of Christmas. Images of the Nightmare before Christmas danced through my head. And then, Pastor Kris sent the video of “Dem Bones” – with trombone playing skeletons that really got me chuckling. Thinking about dancing skeletons had me stopping to think about what makes a skeleton “real”; “human”, “unique” – and not just a “bag of bones”.

As Pastor Kris had mentioned, this passage from Ezekial came during the exile, where Israel felt like it was the end for them. The Israelites have experienced loss, pain, and trauma during the Exile. As Michael Chan discusses in his commentary on The Working Preacher, the bones signify more than the violent loss of human life; they embody the savaging of a collective identity, the shattering of Israel’s deeply rooted aspirations for autonomy, liberation, and prosperity, as well as the profound loss of a homeland.

God looks at the bones and begins to bring life to the bones. The bones come together. Flesh and skin make them look more human like. But the most important thing occurs next – God brings the dry bones alive with his breath. The breath from God allows the objects (bones, skin, flesh) to become “human”. Life is restored to lifeless bones through the breath

of God. It is truly remarkable and a prophecy that is used to provide HOPE for the Israelites.

I began thinking that this story sounds a lot like a Disney movie that I love – and maybe you do to. Stick with me here...this may be a little far fetched...but with each story I read...I kept going back to Simba and the PrideLand. That's right, The Lion King.

For those of you who don't know, the Lion King is an animated, Disney movie about a lion cub, named Simba who is exiled from his kingdom after his father, Mustafa, is murdered by his uncle Scar to seize the throne. As he grows up, Simba must decide whether to return home to confront scar and reclaim his place as king. So, let's see if we can draw some correlations of the movie to the story in Ezekiel.

At the beginning of the Lion King, a prince is born. Breath fills the newborn lion cub's lungs and his father raises him up for all of the Pride Land to see. Simba symbolizes the hope of the Lions' Nation. A newborn King...see I knew I could find Chrstmas somewhere in this story.

As Simba and his friend, Nala, are venturing out on their own one day, the come across the Boneyard. This is an elephant graveyard which is a barren, forbidden place outside the Pride Lands and ruled by the banished Hyenas. Through unfortunate events led by the Hyenas and Scar, Simba's

father Mustafa is killed. Mustafa's breath is gone and the beautiful Pride Lands are overtaken by the Hyenas. The Pride Land becomes dark. It is reflective of the spiritual and physical desolation caused by the corrupt rule of the hyenas. The land is dead and dry. This symbolizes hopelessness and lack of the rightful king's presence. Simba, who should be king, flees because he feels like this is all his fault. The animals in the Pride Land, including the lions, all feel hopeless, defeated, and like their nation has fallen. Simba is gone. They have no leader. The Circle of Life is broken. Maybe this is similar to how the Israelites are feeling during Exile.

Simba treks off to escape the sadness, fear, hopelessness of losing his father and the Pride Lands. Everyone he has left behind thinks Simba has died. They are all living in sadness. Simba, very much still physically alive, although spiritually broken travels far away. He meets some great friends – Timon and Pumba.

Then, there is a powerful passage – when Simba looks to the sky, reflecting on his tumultuous past, and falls down in defeat. As his body falls to the ground, he stirs up the dust beneath him. The “wind” carries this dust to Rafiki – a funny baboon who is the spiritual guide of the story. The dust travels many miles in the wind...and then...Rafiki grasps the

dust from the air and “realizes” that Simba is ALIVE. The SPIRIT is alive! Rafiki, maybe a prophet. I suspect that Rafiki is a prophet because prophets are chosen to be spokespersons, delivering divine messages, warnings, or guidance to humanity.

So, Rafiki goes in search of Simba in his new life. Rafiki finds Simba and “shows” Simba that his father, Mustafa’s spirit lives with in him. Rafiki reminds Simba that he is “Mustafa’s son”. Even though Mustafa has died and his breath is gone, his spirit lives. Rafiki “shows” Simba his father, Mustafa, who comes to him in the clouds – kind of like a dream. Rafiki continues to remind Simba that his father lives within him. Just like God, our father, lives within us. In our Breath. In our Spirit.

The movie concludes with Simba returning to the Pride Lands, defeating Scar. Rain comes bringing new growth, new life back to the Pride Lands. This symbolizes a spiritual and physical rebirth – The rain brought hope to the Pride Land. Hope of better days ahead. Ezekiel’s vision is a promise that God will breathe new life into His people. Restore them to their land, and renew their spirit. The message is one of hope and the promise of God’s restorative power.

Hope was the theme of our Wednesday Advent service and rings true today. What is hope? Hope is a feeling...a want...a

desire. Hope is a noun...it is a thing...but it is not a “physical” thing. I cannot put hope in a jar or hang hope on my wall. But, can we give hope? Like giving a gift...can we receive hope? Can we “feel” hope?

Similar to feeling hope, we can be hopeless. As we move through the month of December, I challenge you to think about hope? Have there been times when you were like Simba – missing your loved one, hopeless at the life ahead, and feeling uncertain about your role? What gave you hope? Was it a kind stranger, like Rafiki, that gave you a compliment or appreciated your work and talents? Was it a hug from a friend? Was it laughter? Was it your children or grandchildren? Was it the Holy Spirit. Was it the wind in your face, the breath of a new life that gave you hope? This holiday season, I encourage us all to find ways to bring hope to those around us. Share hope through God’s Message this holiday season. Amen.