



**VILLAGE
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

Keep Questioning

SCRIPTURE:
Ezekiel 37:1-14

May 5, 2024 — Sermon by Rev. Sally S. Wright

Youtube. TikTok. Facebook. They all have these videos of this lawn guy who records himself taming the wild growth of neglected lawns. The results are amazing. The forgotten yard goes from wild, unkept and overgrown, to neat, organized and beautiful. And he does all of this yard work for free. This lawn guy breathes new life into these yards. And it's addicting to watch.

So, what do overgrown yards have to do with Ezekiel? Let's take a moment and remember our Old Testament history together.

The year was 586 BCE. The Babylonians besieged Jerusalem. To be very clear, they completely destroyed Jerusalem including the temple that Solomon had built. And twelve years later the Babylonians sent anyone left in Jerusalem into exile.

Ezekiel, one of those sent into exile, spoke to these traumatized people of Jerusalem. They were dazed and confused by the terror that had taken over their daily lives. They grappled with where God was now. If the temple was where God lived among the people and it is now destroyed, would a living God still be possible? Where was God now?

In my five years as a pastoral-care pastor at Village Church, I have walked with several of you asking the same question, "Where is God now?" We discover through the prophecies of Ezekiel that there can be a future life with God after the world crashes in calamity and nothing familiar remains.

Y'all, we believe in a God that will not let the people waste away in exile. We believe in a God who will not let you go. We believe in a God who will continue to ask, "Can these bones live?"

Have you ever wondered why God would ask Ezekiel that question? The divine one asking the mortal one, "Can these bones live?" Does God not know?

It seems God asks Ezekiel this question because

God always moves first. God sees the misery of God's people. God sees the destroyed temple. God hears the prayers of lament. And God finds Ezekiel, a former priest and takes him to a valley filled with the dry bones of the Israelite army and asks, "Can these bones live?"

Can these bones live? How would you respond? Would you be the sarcastic one and reply, "Yeah, sure God, you know." Would you be the realistic one and reply, "Looking around the decimated city and exiled people, it is doubtful, God." Would you be the faithful one and reply, "Lord God, you are the sovereign one. You are the only one who knows."

Ezekiel takes the faithful approach. He confirms that it is only God who could know the future. After Ezekiel's affirmation of God's sovereignty, only then does God tell Ezekiel what to do: Prophecy to the bones and tell them they will live.

Let's pause, take a deep breath and recap: God asks Ezekiel if the bones can live. Ezekiel does two things: 1) Affirms God's sovereignty 2) Does what God asks of him.

Village Church, throughout your history you have heard God ask, "Can these bones live?" In La Romana, Dominican Republic, you heard God ask, "Can there be a hospital? A school? Health care in the bateys?" You said, "God, only you know." And have worked every year for 25 years to make the bricks turn into buildings that provide life-saving surgeries and schooling to the youngest children. When the buildings were finished, you realized God was not done with La Romana. And you began visiting the small communities of sugarcane workers and providing health care, dental care, playing with the children, and more.

You have heard God ask, "Can these bones live?" when Rev. David Nzioka came to Village Church and shared that his hometown of Thwake, Kenya needed

a girls' home. In rural Kenya, the youngest girls from large, subsistence farming families typically do not get any schooling. In many ways, they are forgotten children. You heard God ask, "Can you provide a life for these girls?" So, in 2016, Village Church, you, along with other churches in our presbytery, helped raise enough money to build the girls a home and hire two matrons to care, feed, clothe and educate them. In 2016 the goal was to get each of the 12 girls through primary school. In 2019, the oldest girls graduated from primary school. You heard God ask again, "Can these bones live?" And you partnered with other churches to raise money to send them to secondary school. Then in 2023, the oldest of the girls graduated high school. Now, we hear the same question again, "Can these bones live?" Except this time, the question sounds more like, "How are we going to pay to send them to college?" God is still at work. This same story is true in so many places in this church. Look around and see!

Ok, so let's bring this home. Where are the seemingly dead places in your life? In this world? What is lifeless in your world right now? Maybe your marriage or a relationship with a family member feels ossified. Maybe exhaustion and overwhelm are the two adjectives you use to describe your life. What would it be like if God asked you, "Can your bones live more fully?"

Or, maybe it is a literal death. Someone is gone and you are not sure how to craft a life without that person. Each of us has parts of our lives where God might be asking, "Can these bones live?" Can we join

Ezekiel in being willing to let God in?

When I was in college, I interned one semester at the Texas State Capitol. I worked for Rep. Lois Kolkorst. I learned many things that semester. For example: The Texas legislature only meets for five months every two years. I learned how to ghost write letters to constituents (and the importance of spell check). And, I learned about the Texas Sunset Agency Commission.

In Texas, the Sunset Agency Commission reviews 20-30 of the state's agencies every two years determining which ones remain active and viable and which ones the sun needs to set on (hence the name). I was impressed at the time at the foresight of the Texas legislature to know that there would be a time when an agency's mission was complete and the resources needed to go to new projects.

In a way, the Texas legislature has found a way to regularly incorporate the question, "Can these bones live?" into the life of the government. I wonder what it would be like if every single one of us started echoing God and asking, "Can these bones live?"

Whether you see an overgrown lawn, you are the people of God exiled from Jeruslaem, or you are just trying to make it through the day, or your mission has reached its sunset, let us echo God and ask the question: Can these bones live? For God is ready to breathe new life into the lifeless places in our church, our world and in our lives.

This is God's promise: I will put my spirit within you and you shall live then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord. Amen.