

Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

You, like me, will have been touched by the actions of a random stranger. Crossing the Manukau Harbour Bridge, he heard screams for help as a 2-year-old boy lay dying in the freezing waters. He could have given into despair, or he could have denied he could help. Instead with no thought for his own safety, or indeed his dignity, he hurriedly ripped off his clothes and jumped 10 metres into the choppy waters of the harbour below. He swam to the boy and carried him back to the rough concrete under the bridge. There he began CPR, including the breath of life on the lifeless boy. Though convinced that the child had already died he didn't stop breathing the precious gift of life into the child. It was not until the boy started breathing for himself that he stopped and, even then, he continued to cradle this complete stranger in his arms. Trying to keep him warm, speaking words of comfort, and desperately hoping the rescue helicopter would come. It did. He loaded the now fully alive child onto the winch. It was only then that he allowed himself the luxury of breaking down in tears, and getting his own bruises and scratches and his need for warmth seen to.

When asked later why he did it, he simply said "I have two kids of my own." What he modelled that freezing day was certainly the actions of a Good Samaritan, but he also showed us what God is like. God is the one who cradles us and gives us the gift of life.

The great prophet Ezekiel brings us our first reading today. He was a prophet to the people of God when they faced a terrible crisis. They had been invaded by the Babylonians in 600 B.C. Everything they held dear was taken from them: their country, their temple, their freedom and many, many lives. They faced a choice like that man on the bridge: despair, denial, or the way of life, the way of God.

Ezekiel saw many who responded with despair. All hell had broken loose, and some were saying, "We are utterly lost, God has forgotten us." Another group were in denial, they said, "The Babylonians aren't that bad, if we just keep our heads down, we can learn to get along with them. Maybe if we marry them then after a few generations we won't even notice they have invaded us."

Ezekiel gave them a third way, the way of life, the way of God.

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The prophet finds himself in a valley of dry bones. (This would have been very offensive to the Hebrews. Dead bodies were not to be left unburied.) God says to Ezekiel, "*Speak to the valley of dry bones that is my people, say to them, I'm going to put my breath into them, my spirit, tell the wind to blow in them*". And while he was yet speaking the wind came from every direction, and breathed into them and they came to life and stood up.

Sometimes we can be like those people of Ezekiel's day.

Many of us on the issue of Climate Change move between denial and despair. Maybe it isn't really happening or, if it is, what can I really do. There is of course a third way, and that has been the topic of our Lenten studies.

This congregation has great experience in not giving into either denial or despair. Following the deadly earthquakes we had a choice; do we restore St Peter's or not? We could deny the reality; "The hall isn't so bad as long as you don't mind moving 150 chairs and freezing to death." Or we could have given in to despair. "How can we possibly raise millions of dollars?" In the end, of course, we chose neither denial nor despair but the way of life, the way of God.

But we face our biggest challenge yet. The dry bones that our good bishop writes about every week are the lack of young people that are part of our parish. We too have three choices. We can deny we have problem, we can give in to despair, or we can ask the Spirit to give us life.

Our mission action plan is designed to be the third way. Not denying we have a problem, not giving in to despair but humbly asking God to do something, to breathe fresh life into us. Our four goals: digital community growth, growth in our relationship with Victory Church, Care of Creation, and growing Family Church are built on the conviction that God would have us choose the way of life.

By the time Jesus got to the tomb of Lazarus he was so dead that he was smelling. Jesus didn't try and deny his death. He didn't say to his sister "Look, it's alright, you will get over it." Rather, Jesus wept. But he didn't give in to despair. He stood outside the tomb and called on the breath of life, much as Ezekiel did. He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus come out," and the dead man came out alive once more.

I wonder what difficulties you face in your life. The loss of a loved one, ill health, declining income, a child off the rails? I can't know your life, but I do know this, you are faced with the same choices as the man on the bridge, the people of Ezekiel's day, and Jesus at the tomb of a friend. You can give way to despair or denial or you can open yourself to the way of life, God's way. In the midst of trials and dry bones, the Spirit of God is at work still, bringing us to new and abundant life.

Let us pray:

Life giving God,  
You hold me and give me the breath of life.  
Blow your Spirit once more over the challenges I face,  
That I might never give in to despair or denial.  
But open me to your way of life  
Now and forever.  
Amen