

## The Valley of Dry Bones

3000 years ago, - the prophet Ezekiel - is taken to a valley which is full of dry bones and God asked the question – Son of Man Can these bones live?

It was a question that was directed to the people of Israel who had been taken captive years early. They were cut off from their homes, from their culture, from their people and they were living like dry bones – refugees, exiles in a foreign country.

The psalmist wrote about this, Psalm 137 v4, “how can we song the Lords song in a strange land.?”

It was a strange land to them – most of us will have been in foreign holidays abroad and that usually lasts for a couple of weeks and we are away from home and often engaging with a different culture – can you imagine what it would be like for this to go on for month, years and to be held captive!

What about our fellow human beings trapped in refugee camps around the world, living in makeshift shelters – little food and no hope of return.

What is happening in these centres?

World Communion of Reformed Churches...A few weeks ago, visited the Greek islands of Lesbos and Chios seeing people suffering from the current migrant situation.

On the islands, children, women and men live in terrible conditions. Often, they don't have water or electricity, and the eminent danger of the coming epidemic is extremely high.

The refugees are waiting for a solution for their situation. All the while the citizens of the Greek islands are overwhelmed with the current situation and are expecting assistance from the European Union, including a political solution. We saw a Europe full of selfishness and violence in its politics and not the Europe of peace, we are committed to....

During our time visiting these centres we truly saw that God was beside those who were suffering. In Athens, Lesbos and Chios we could recognize in the face of the refugees the image of our living God. He comes from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran and other countries.

As Christians, we have to raise our voices for the people who are suffering and those who are forgotten behind our own challenges. We have to raise our voices

as well for those who become victims of political machinations. Please do not forget those who are suffering.

Therefore, we call you—even in times of uncertainty—to urge your governments to search for a solution for the refugees in Greece.

We encourage European churches to take up their calling as ambassadors of Christ, to raise their voices in unity, friendship and solidarity to those in need and never resting in our pursuit towards a peaceful humanity.

As we trust in God, the creator of all humanity, in Jesus Christ, who redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit, who broadens our horizons.

—The Steering Committee of WCRC Europe, 17 March 2020

The prophecy of a valley of dry bones, is not a 3000-year-old story, it's a story for today and a story that is being lived out all around the world.

Being cut off, isolated with no hope is a frightening place to be and perhaps for some of us today we are also facing those same fears. The coronavirus has isolated many; from last Sunday, the changes have been immense. Who would have thought that our country would come to a standstill? Who would have thought that large businesses and industry would grind to a halt overnight?

But this happened and we are at the beginning of a lock down and experiencing some of the pain and struggles that the people of Israel faced.

But they were in strange land. They were in Babylon. To be isolated in your own country is indeed a strange place to be. But that's where we are at the moment and as Christians we look to our God.

How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? Is also our question today.

Has God a word to say to us in the midst of our fears? Of course, he has. Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby was asked this week on BBC News, where is God in this crisis? and his response immediately was – He's right here now, in the centre of it.

God's word speaks to us also, "Dry bones hear the word of the Lord and I will make breath enter you and you will come to life. I will attach tendons and sinews and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

It is a message of hope and a message for us all today. It is a message to our churches all over the land, that God is a doing a new thing. The General

Assembly voted last year for radical changes to be made – nobody saw the coronavirus coming down the tracks.

The coronavirus has shaken us all to the core and it has shaken the church also – we are not immune to the effects of this crippling disease but what is happening I believe is that when we come out of this, it will not be business as usual for the church. It will be a time of revaluation and a time of appreciation and a time of deep learning for us all, for this has shaken our world and our churches, out of our complacency and to those who are brave enough to embrace the new world that will emerge after this virus, will hear the words of the Lord, Can these bones live?

And we may also say Sovereign Lord, only you know, and if we are open to him and allow him to work through us he will say to us prophesy, speak my words into the dry bones, into the dead areas of our lives and churches and watch and see a rattling sound and see the bones taken shape and coming together and the Lord will bring his spirit from the four corners of the earth and the bones will arise and a mighty army will be formed. This is Ezekiel's vision. It is also a vision for us today.

All the petty things that we cherished only a few weeks ago are no longer important. God is doing a new thing.

At this time, we must hold onto hope and believe and trust in hope that God has not finished with us, that he is doing a new thing and that we will be stronger and when the virus has passed, we will indeed rise again, like a living army.

So, this is a message of comfort and hope. That God can and God will do great things out of a crisis but it is also a message of challenge to be prepared to listen to the word of Lord and to hear him say, Can these bones live, Son of Man?

Today, I wish you all well and I hope and pray that you stay safe and are protected from this virus. I'm missing seeing you all but these days will pass and we will be again reunited together at Cadder Church.