



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title: "Can These Bones Live?"
Comment: Insert Comment here
Author: The Rev. Tyler A. Strand

Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Ezekiel 37:1-14
Second Reading Revelation 5:6-14
Gospel John 21:1-14

I am a great fan of the 'Discovery' channel. I watch it every chance I get, even asking them to tune it in on the television sets at the health club while I work out. (Yes, believe it or not, I do indeed work out!) So I was prepared to be engaged when they rebroadcast a programme a week ago having to do with the great battle at Gallipoli whose commemoration is the origin of the observance we are keeping today. I learned just how awful conditions were during the battle, how rudimentary communications were compared with today's military science, and how many people died, tragically, uselessly, as much from sickness and heat as from bullets and shells. The programme showed the dry hills and fields of that peninsula as they are today, in more irenic times as part of an allied and supportive modern Turkish Republic. But the point was powerfully made that bones of those who fell in that battle so long ago are still turned up in the soil by farmers: bones that, to all intents and purposes, could belong to anyone involved in that combat, be they Aussie, Kiwi, Brit or Turk.

This image of the bones in the dry fields immediately made me think of the passage of the Old Testament that we had read to us here this morning, taken from the book of the prophet Ezekiel. It, too, deals with a valley of dry bones. In this case, most likely the remains of the conflict surrounding the fall of the Judean state to Mesopotamian conquerors in 586 B.C. Ezekiel may well have been present both during and after the fall of Jerusalem; he would have known these bones first hand. This makes it even more significant when, in the course of addressing his people about their future, he pens his famous description of the resurrection and reanimation of the bones into human beings again.

Ezekiel hopes to give the exiled people of ancient Israel hope in a new beginning, but one that is not only the result of the changes of time and tide. Rather, it would be God Himself who would be acting in the life of His people, "breathing" into their lost dreams and dashed ambitions a new meaning and a new direction. It is a hope that we might also have as we contemplate that other place of dry bones, not too terribly far north from Ezekiel's own battlefield, at a place where so many died on this day in 1915. We still face a world of warfare and hatred. If not Gallipoli, nevertheless the very site of the prophet's *ancient* vision is still a place of war, and if we recall that the Babylonia whose forces fought Israel in that ancient conflict is now the nation known as Iraq, then the inevitability of yet more dry bones seems sure in the fertile crescent of God's Holy Lands. We face too the reality that former enemies like Britain, Turkey, Australia and New Zealand, and our own host, the Philippines, face mutual threats of terrorism, fanaticism and desperate racial, religious and political hatred. How sad that it is still war, not peace, that brings us together today.

Yet, Ezekiel's words, and his image of flesh and sinews reconstructing the bodies of living men infused with the spirit of God's four winds, live significantly on in our religious tradition. Christians read this passage as part of our Easter night observance as we celebrate the world's most definitive Resurrection from the dead, and it remains one of the best-known passages of all of the Old Testament. Why? Because it has spoken to many generations about God's intervention in a world grown mad with its own lusts and hate: His act of mercy, not the total destruction we so richly deserve: the promise of new life, undeserved, unmerited, but nevertheless miraculously, compassionately given.

And it is that hope that must drive us on even now: *hope*- not a fond wish that things could be different, that people could be nicer, that we could all "just get along." It is a realistic hope in the face of the fact that human sin will inevitably choke our "niceness" and thwart our best human intentions to undo the mess that our forebears left to us; it is a holy hope and faith in a God who is still interested enough in human history to inspire the dead bones of our lost love with the breath of His Spirit, empowering us to find new ways for peace, new venues of compassion: to dream great dreams and to make courageous plans. Such is the will of the God both of world history and of the human heart.

We start the process here and now, by vowing that those dead whom we remember today shall not have died in vain: not, at least, in the vain pursuit of national interest alone; not even in vague and fleeting concepts of what is just or righteous in a compromised and cynical world, but as the sign to us that we must do all we can to see that such deaths do not remain the inevitable result of human existence on this planet. God has so much more in mind for us, and He is still ready to loose the winds

of His Spirit to bring life to us once more. "Can these dead bones live?" With God's grace, *we will*.