

It has been another week: distanced, sold out, fearful, out of rhythm. There have been lots of conversations about getting back to normal. It has been a week: distanced, sold out, fearful, and out of time. Friends have said that it all feels surreal. It reminds me of Salvador Dali's "The Persistence of Memory" his painting of clocks melting over tree branches. Surrealism was the intentional creation of artists between World War I and WW II. It forces itself upon parts of our hearts and souls that long for logic and order. The surrealist captures our attention, and then forces us to react to what we see.....as nonsensical and irrational as it can seem....and words don't touch the twist of reality that happens in here. It has been a week: distanced, sold out, fearful, and meaningless. No, maybe surreal.

I love the Valley of Dry Bones image. It has a surrealism woven within it, but it is one of the most hope-filled images in the Old Testament. Salvador Dali doesn't have a thing on the writer of Ezekiel!

What do you see? Comes the question from within. Bones, skeletons, the victims of battle, patriots, sons, brothers, fathers who stood up for the good of country. Noble, I guess. But, this particular valley of bones was well known to the people of Ezekiel's day. This was Megiddo, the plain upon which the Hebrew army was soundly defeated, and their good king, Josiah, was killed. Israel lost the battle. It became the Jewish equivalent of our "remember the Alamo." Megiddo was a hopeless place.

Son of man, can these bones live? What would you say? In the midst of this vast pandemic, is there hope? I believe there is, and that hope comes to us beyond the pall of inconvenience. So, we self quarantine at home, are incapable of fighting this enemy on our own.

I have to say that this COVID-19 bug has left a lot of us like those strewn bones at Megiddo. Scattered....lifeless.... powerless. At this point in Ezekiel's vision the foe was gone. The truth: a foe had defeated them. Soundly.

Can these bones live? Can these bodies be reunited, drawn together, sinew tied, muscle molded, skin wrapped? Can they mortal man? You fix them mortal man, if you think you are so smart!

"It's surreal" my friends say. Logically and rationally this should not be a problem....but....and there's always a but....people are dying. Logically and rationally there should be a cure, a vaccine, a get out of jail free card that would clear us all to get back to work, and back to gathering, and back to normal. Makes sense, doesn't it?

Well...that's where my friends are correct: it is surreal....but it is not the end. You see, in the end...hope wins. In the end...love wins! Son of man prophesy to the bones, and he spoke the word of hope. And the hope caused the bones to rattle. Son of man prophesy to the bones, and he spoke the word of grace and the connections were made, strong connections like ligaments and tendons. Strength preceded their form....and my guess is that many of you pray for strength to endure during this pandemic... Son of man, prophesy to these bones, and he spoke the word of mercy, that love that forgives, and stands lifeless, empty, sad people up...and the bones were covered with muscle and wrapped in skin, and they stood up a veritable army.... connected, strong, and powerful....but there was no life in them.

What do you make of that? The nation stood, but there was no life in them. They were silent. They were stuck. They were still. It was as if time had melted over the branches of a small tree. In this empty, silent time....we await that word....we look for direction....we long for connection, again.

Fifteen days.....might seem like forever when your routines are interrupted. Fifteen days.....may seem impossible if you cannot hug your grandkids, or kiss your grown children.

Fifteen days.....can be like a fraction of a second in the scope of all of history.

I know, I want the word to ring out on day 16.....all is well, all is well. Arise from your slumber and see, and hear, and taste, and touch. Son of man, call to the four-winds.....let the winds arise, and let that breath CPR these standing lifeless ones! That wind, is called Ruah....it means wind, breath, and Spirit.....

In the midst of our separation; In the midst of our fear; In the midst of our isolation....breathe in the Holy Spirit. Breathe in the source of new life. Breathe in the powerful presence of God now, in this time, in this space. Breathe oh nation of freedom. Breathe oh church of new life and compassion. Breathe oh people infected with fear, breathe and be made confident. Breathe in you who doubt, or fear, or sigh in the night for direction and hope....breathe in the power of God's very present Spirit.

Breathe in, for in the end grace wins. Breathe in, for in the end love wins.

Breathe in and bloom with the radiant joy of springtime and the soft explosions of colorful love. Breathe in, oh people.....breathe in, and now whisper . Amen.