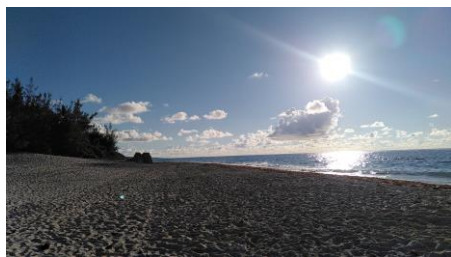


Beaches, bones and branches: *Ezekiel 37 and John 15.*



Many of you know that I love to walk on my beach in Burntisland and take time to think and pray in the wind, sunshine or rain. Recently I have had the pleasure of being able to swim in the warm and salty sea off Elbow beach in Bermuda – a very different environment to the beaches of the Fife coast. But coming back home I was thrilled to be able to be back on my beach again at low tide and to pray for the place where God has put me.

I found myself praying for the town and area as I looked back from the Black Rock and for Edinburgh and our nation as I looked across the Forth. It was a windy day and I was thinking of the devastation



that the current pandemic has brought to our nation and its institutions. I was wondering how it looks to God and how He would like us to be praying into what is happening. We have been living in Fife now for 30 years and I have a sadness that in that time we have not seen the revival that we have prayed for, but have watched a the



process of aging and death in much of the Scottish church, in spite of the good things that have happened in parts. It is disappointing for us to consider that this has happened on our watch and in our generation.

I found myself thinking of the passage in Ezekiel 37 about the valley of dry bones and I asked God if we have finished with the dying part and can now get onto the resurrection. Sometimes one prays for more of this life when a person is dying and other times for a good death, knowing that we have eternal life. As much as we run a healing ministry we recognise that there is a time to die as well as a time to be born and we do not need to be afraid of dying. Perhaps that is true of church plans and projects as well, which need to stop to make way for the new thing.



*Ecclesiastes 3:2 a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,*

I found myself seeing the pandemic as something that might help ease the passing of the parts of our life that need to die, whether that is individually or corporately. I know that when I become a Christian there was a need for the old life to die and the new to be reborn. That in practice has been an ongoing process, rather than an overnight event. I am constantly surprised to find myself reminded that I haven't "died" as much as I thought I had, and that a bit more (unpleasant) process is needed.

So the last few weeks of confusion, frustration and changing goal posts in helping our daughter get to the US to get married have been something God has used to knock off a few more corners of my pride, selfishness and desire to be in control. More positively, it has been a chance to trust God more, realise how much I need Him and can't do much without Him. (Oh dear: more dying is required!) Interestingly also a realisation that the waiting has been so active – so much doing and responding has been required of us in our situation to make things happen, in partnership with prayer and listening to God. Even doing something as ridiculous as booking flights to Bermuda in order to get Lucy and Peter to the USA.

So have a look at the passages below I have been thinking about and ask God what He is saying to you through these and you read and think about them.

I am praying that we get to the resurrection part because I am impatient to get past the dying and I want the happy ending sooner. I do recognise that some dying is needed, or some pruning of the branches that are not fruitful, painful as that is. In the John 15 passage Jesus finishes with the command to love – the most important thing to remember if we forget everything else. If we can face every situation determined to choose love then we will be close to the heart of Jesus.

Diane



Ezekiel 37 *The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me to and fro among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. ³ He asked me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’*

I said, ‘Sovereign Lord, you alone know.’

⁴ Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to these bones and say to them, “Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! ⁵ This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.”’

⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸ I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

⁹ Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.”’ ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army.

¹¹ Then he said to me: ‘Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.” ¹² Therefore prophesy and say to them: “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴ I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.”’

John 15 *‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

⁵ ‘I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

⁹ ‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: love each other as I have loved you.