SO WHAT: Ezekiel is given a vision of a valley of dry, brittle bones that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, are brought to new life. The message to exiled Israel, and all of God’s people, is that when hope appears gone, life is found in Him.

Death and hopelessness. Destruction and loss. Everywhere Ezekiel looked, he saw death, hopelessness, destruction and loss. The image we are given is a large valley whose floor is covered with layer upon layer upon layer of dry, brittle, bones. These were human bones, scattered and heaped haphazardly over the desert floor; the bones were dry and brittle, as if they had baked in the sun for a long time. As far as the eye could see, there was nothing but death, hopelessness, destruction, and loss. There was no vision for the future…at least no vision for a positive future. That was Ezekiel’s vision.

What is your vision? Look at the world around you…what do you see? A rise in unprovoked violent crimes; gang wars; illicit drug and alcohol use; rioting; wars and terrorism; crumbling infrastructure; decline in moral/ethical behavior; a loss of community focus; strained or broken relationships and families; a rise in cancer and other diseases; brokenness. In many ways the world in which we live is much like the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel’s vision. But what if we narrow our focus? What if instead of looking at the world around us we limited our scope to the church…what do you see? Often times we see declining membership; decline in regular attendance…it used to be that regular attendance was defined as 3 to 4 Sundays a month but now attending 2 Sundays a month is considered regular; a straying from Biblical values as we see the
influence of the world creeping in; divisions and battles over programs; shrinking mission budgets; and in the US alone 4,000 churches a year close their doors for good. Yes, the valley of dry bones surrounds us.

Ezekiel’s vision comes after Israel has been in exile for 10 years…and they are beginning to see only death, hopeless, destruction and loss…they see no way out of their current situation. But don’t forget that Ezekiel’s vision of dry bones is the beginning of the vision and not the end. The question God puts to Ezekiel is this, “Can these bones live?” His answer? “O Lord, you know.” In essence he says, “Lord, of course not…this is a scene of death, and that is obvious to everyone.” But God tells him to prophesy, to share the Word of God, to tell of the life giving power of the God who created all that is. And as he did, it appeared that the bones came to life…they were covered with ligaments and flesh and skin…but there was no breath in them. While they appeared to be alive they only rattled. It seems that perhaps at first movement Ezekiel stopped his prophesying, but he was not through. It was only after he continued to prophesy about the power of the Spirit of God that true life entered the lifeless bodies.

Two things to note here…what is impossible with humans…bringing life where there is only death…is possible with God. But we must be careful to fully give ourselves to God. Often it appears we have given things to God and yet we maintain control…we may, often quite unintentionally, begin to rely on our own selves and not God. But true life only comes from God and His Holy Spirit. The message to Israel was not to give up hope…regardless of what their circumstances appeared to be. And the message to us? The same. When we look at all the hurt and pain in the world…and we see the decay of the social fabric…we need to know that God
can, and will, bring new life. When we look at the Church today…when we grieve at the state of the church and where it appears to be headed…we must know and trust that God is in control and that He isn’t through with us. When His time is right He will renew and restore us. But we must never be content with the way things are; we must never be content to think we have all the answers…no, we must continually lean on God and seek the outpouring of His Holy Spirit to fill us with life and breath.

And this table before you…the communion table…the Lord’s Table…reminds us that God is not the God of death but the God of new life. It reminds us of Jesus sacrifice of his body and blood on the cross. It proclaims God’s love and grace to His people. So prepare yourselves to come…prepare to come and receive Christ into your life. Prepare to be filled with the Holy Spirit and the gift of new life.

Amen.