

Easter Vigil 2024

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Cathedral Church of St. Paul

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Can these bones live?

The prophet Ezekiel is living in a time of desperation and despair; the City of Jerusalem has been overrun by the Babylonians. He himself has been carried off into exile in the second wave of deportations. Yet still, he speaks the word of God to the people of Judah answering the question, "Can there be life in the midst of all this death?"

*The prophet Ezekiel tells the story of the spirit of the Lord God coming upon him and being whisked to a valley of bones, everywhere he looked, nothing but bones, how could he even walk...*

*God asks Ezekiel, "Tell me mortal, can these bones live?"*

*To which Ezekiel replies, "Only you know that Lord."*

*Prophecy says God. Prophecy to these bones. Say to them, "Hear the word of the Lord."*

*So Ezekiel says, "I talk to the bones, I talk to the dead dry bones, I tell them that the Lord will put breath in them and sinews and skin upon them. I speak to them, I say it all.*

*And there was, says Ezekiel, a clinking, a clattering a rattling and quaking and darned if those bones didn't begin to come back together. There were sinews and flesh, skin too. But not any breath yet. Biblical zombies if you will...*

*So the Lord says, "Prophecy again Ezekiel. Say to the breath say to the four winds, blow and fill these forms and let them live."*

*"And I did," says Ezkiel, and there stood before me an entire community back from the brink.*

*They who thought that their hopes had perished are standing here.*

*God says, "Tell them mortal that I will open their graves and they will live."*

*Bit by bit, moment by minute, life came, slowly hope returned. Change is like that, hope returns, born bit by bit, miracles, even resurrection takes time.*

This year's Oscar winner for best Foreign Films, is a piece written and directed by Jonathan Glazer, entitled *Zone of Interest*. It offers a dramatic account of the Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Hoss, his wife and his family as they seek to create a paradise for themselves just outside the walls of the infamous concentration camp. Hoss had five children, three girls and two boys. They lived in a villa whose gorgeous flower filled yard backs to the camp. The film never shows the atrocities that happen at Auschwitz, instead throughout the

movie there is a constant background of gun shots, barking dogs, men and women and children crying and screaming, punctuated with periodic, muffled shouts and commands. It is, if you will, a terror soundtrack. When the camera pulls back from the sweet little backyard pool with a wooden slide, and stunning blooming flowers, heavy grapevines, and lush vegetable plots, you see the nearby chimneys attached to the crematorium belching smoke and the barb wire atop the walls.

The noise of mass murder and slave labor is juxtaposed to joyful birthday parties, gracious summer picnics, and tender family visits all interspersed with periodic intrusions of what can only be described as mundane, banal office politics. Office politics that involve the mass murder of more than a million human beings during Hoss's 4 year tenure as commandant.

In the course of the movie, the vexing issue for Hoss and his family is that he is so good, so creative, so efficient in either killing people immediately or condemning them to be slaves for the Reich that he is promoted and forced to move. His wife refuses to leave the paradise they have created. "This is what we have worked for and for what we have dreamed, I could never leave here, I want to die here. Our children are happy and strong and safe here." She says all this to him by the idyllic river, filled with human bones near their home. A conversation that takes place atop the chilling noise of death that is Auschwitz.

Do the children know? The oldest son 13 or 14 or so rides horses with his father, all around the camp walls, enjoying nature, listening for Great Heron bird calls as slave laborers are driven past. He knows. The other children it's very hard to tell.

But twice the movie flashes to another child. A local 12 year old Polish girl who knows what's going on. A true story, of Aleksandra Bystron-Kolodziejczyk a young girl who lives in town. She's a member of the Polish Home Army, the Polish resistance. This twelve-year-old rides her bike at night, carrying large bags of apples and pears. She puts the apples and pears near the work sites where the slave laborers are likely to be the next morning. She places them in bushes and dirt piles along the paths the slaves are likely to walk. Fruit: Hidden from the guards, but visible to the ones doing the work. Precious bits of life and hope offered to people who are literally starving to death.

In the midst of the ignored savagery, there is this young person's nightly acts of bravery and resistance. She risks her life, for people she does not know, human beings she chooses not to forget. Small, brilliant, brave actions amidst the bones and the ash of the Auschwitz factory of death. Offering life.

Friends, there are bones all around us in this time of ours, but this is the night, when we who are people of faith are called to look beyond casual cruelty and the despair of death, this is the night when we remember that our Lord Jesus Christ passed over from death unto life. And this is the night that you, stunning ones that you are, individuals made in God's image and likeness, this is the night as you take another step on your journey of faith, this is the night that you and all of us embrace all that God is calling us to be. This is the night when we too walk with God amidst the valley of bones and do as God asks and prophecy to the bones. This is the night that we carry our own bags of apples and pears and plant them everywhere as a testament to God's hope, God's love and God's call.

This is the night when we remember again that God has called us to use all God is giving us to alter the course of the world. Worried about the Children in Gaza? What is one step you can take and ask for other people to join with you?

Worried about the state of our earth and coming climate change, what is one step, one apple of hope you can offer along the way?

People are not kind, to you or someone else, what is one action you can take, to show you care? So that you and they and we are not so all alone.

We have a choice, dear friends, we have a choice, to be the people who live in a villa, on edge of hell, ignoring the ashes of death and cries of despair. OR We can move beyond our zones of comfort, nurture our souls, embody our God and place apples and pears, pieces of hope, everywhere we go.

This is the night for us to decide...

Amen.