

October 21, 2018

Born That Way: Growing Up and Out

First Reading ~ *Ezekiel 37:1-14*

The hand of God came upon me, and brought me out by the spirit of God and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. God led me all around them — there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry — and God said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?”

I answered, “O God, you know.”

Then God said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of God. Thus says God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am God.”

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then God said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”

I prophesied as God commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then God said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am God, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, God, have spoken and will act, says God.”

Second Reading ~ adapted from “*Ezekiel Understand AIDS: Reading the Bible with HIV*” by Rev. Jim Miltulski in “*Take Back The Word: a queer reading of the Bible*”

In the Castro at the height of the AIDS pandemic, the Metropolitan Community Church of San Francisco was the church at the center of the maelstrom. It was a place where many churched and unchurched gay men dying with AIDS found a home. There were years when Rev. Jim Mitulski, the senior pastor, celebrated over 500 funerals. For several

years, he read Ezekiel's vision about the resurrection of dry bones as a metaphor of his pastoral experience and his own HIV experience, expressing a vision of a Post-AIDS era.

People with HIV understand exile. We are estranged from family and society, from church and community, because of a disease and how we got it. Even within the queer communities there is stigmatization of people with HIV who became infected after the mid-1980's because the moral judgment is made that we should have known better. People with HIV also understand the innate desire of the soul and the body to overcome adversity and to survive. We understand that denial is an impediment to spiritual growth, and we know that healing only comes in the context of truth telling, even if uncomfortable truth telling. Our doctors cannot help us unless we accurately depict our past and our present. We understand that resurrection when practiced daily and individually can become a collective reality. We understand the power of God to heal and transform through hope. These insights culled from the social location of living with HIV can make the pages of the Bible come alive. They help us to see and tell our own story as part of divine revelation.