

Ezekiel's dry bones vision (37:1–14) serves as a parable about the power of preaching. The prophet is plunked down into the middle of the killing fields, amid bones of once-living human beings which the scavengers, blazing sun, and the passage of time have rendered very dry. The bewildered Ezekiel is commanded to prophesy into this tragic situation, and when he obeys, the bones start to rattle and move, re-forming skeletons. Flesh and sinews appear and bodies re-form, but they remain corpses, awaiting life-giving breath. Ezekiel is commanded to prophesy a second time, and as he does, the *ruach* (breath/wind/spirit) enters the bodies,

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and they stand “on their feet, a vast multitude.” God then declares that these bones represent the people of Israel: their death is the hopelessness and despair of exile, and their resurrection will entail restoration to the land and their renewal as God's people.

In this story God is the one who resurrects and heals Israel. A God capable of raising the dead hardly needs assistance from a bewildered prophet, but that is not how the story is told. Skeletons and bodies re-form and

corpses are restored to life only when Ezekiel prophesies. God uses the prophetic word to unleash the power of resurrection into the community of faith. After the dry bones are resurrected, God commands Ezekiel to prophesy a third time, this time to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. Ezekiel's prophecy is the life-giving word that renews flickering faith, empowering exiles to hope for and thereby already participate in God's renewal and restoration.

There is sound biblical foundation for a theme that runs through this issue of *Vision*: that God chooses to work through preaching. Like the words of Ezekiel, our preaching may facilitate

an encounter with the living God and may unleash the power of resurrection into this world. The two lead articles by Allan Rudy-Froese and Paul Scott Wilson both make such claims by asserting that effective and faithful preaching doesn't just say things; it does things—and what it does is the gospel. Therefore, preachers ought to prepare sermons and preach so as to proclaim and facilitate this happening of the gospel.

Thomas Long reflects on the preacher's role as a vigilant witness, ever attentive to the presence of God in ordinary life, who then boldly testifies to the truth of God's presence with us, so that even a New York diner at 4:00 a.m. becomes a theatre of the glory of God. Long touches briefly on the image of the preacher as the witness whom the congregation sends to scripture on its behalf to discern how God encounters us there, and who returns to testify about this life-changing encounter (surely an Anabaptist theology of preaching, if there ever was one).¹

Ryan Ahlgrim explores ways preachers can move from biblical text to sermon, empowering them to testify so that God's Spirit will pull us up by the hairs of our heads! June Alliman Yoder pleads with the church to keep preaching at the center of its worship, because—in contrast to other elements of worship, in which we address God—through scripture reading and preaching, the tables are turned and God addresses us. Renee Sauder and Michele Hershberger both advocate creative ways to testify effectively so that the gospel is heard, understood, and experienced. Sermons by Michele Rizoli and Dan Epp-Tiessen seek to model such creative ways of doing the gospel. John H. Neufeld reflects on how preaching does the gospel by equipping believers to cope with life's inevitable crises, so that they might experience life to the full. Drawing insights from African American tradition, Dennis Edwards reminds us that if preaching is to be transformative, it must invite concrete responses from the hearers. Finally, Don Rempel Boschman shares wisdom for maintaining a fresh and vital preaching ministry in a long pastorate.

May this issue of *Vision* inspire preaching that God uses to resurrect dry bones.

Note

¹ For a much fuller discussion, see Long's preaching textbook, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 45–51.