

Good morning! Quite a few years ago, a neighbor gave us a hydrangea that she had dug up in her yard. For whatever reason, we never got around to planting it and eventually, we just forgot about it. One day my Mom was visiting us and saw what looked like some dead sticks on our porch. "What are those?" she asked. We said, "Oh, that was a hydrangea that a neighbor gave us but we never got around to planting it. I guess we'll just throw it out in the woods." Mom, who knew nothing about planting but knew a great deal about living in faith and hope, said, "Why don't you just plant it and see what happens?" We did, and, today, it has become several large and very robust bushes -- and we have to trim them every year. Appearances can deceive us, can't they? We like to think we know a lot based on what we see but in fact, we often know very little. This morning, let's look in on a familiar passage and consider how God might speak to us about appearances:

The Lord took hold of me, and I was carried away by the Spirit of the Lord to a valley filled with bones. He led me all around among the bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground and were completely dried out. Then he asked me, "Son of man, can these bones become living people again?" "O Sovereign Lord," I replied, "you alone know the answer to that." Then he said to me, "Speak a prophetic message to these bones and say, 'Dry bones, listen to the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

Ezek. 37:1-6

I have to give Ezekiel some credit on this one! If God showed me a bunch of dry bones and asked me if they could become people again, I would have just said, "Nope." Ezekiel at least considered the possibility, saying, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know the answer to that." We often look around us at the people we know and we think that we can measure the possibilities for them. I was reminded of that just a few days ago when Pam and I were talking about someone we knew. We agreed that we didn't see much hope for that person but then I remembered the apostle Paul. If you remember, Paul didn't seem like a very good candidate for church membership, either. Before he was converted, Paul spent all of his time going around the country in an all-out effort to imprison or kill Christians. Yet into this frenzy of anti-Christian mayhem, God spoke to Paul and changed not only Paul's life, but the course of history.

In fact, God is still changing lives today through the writings Paul left us. In today's passage, God gave Ezekiel a prophetic message to speak to those bones that they would live again. And what would be the result of seeing that? "Then you will know that I am the Lord." It is interesting to me that God told him that when he saw that happening, he would better understand who God is. God can make dead bones live. God can change people who seem dead to God and give them warm and beating hearts to seek Him and make Him known to others. This morning I'm speaking to someone. Don't give up on that friend or family member who seems (to you) completely dead to Christ. God really can make dead bones live! Pray for them. Love them. Seek their good. When God moves in that person's life you---and they---will know that Jesus is Lord!