

Sometimes, things are not what they seem. Two different people can look at a dilapidated rocking chair. One can look at it and say, "That chair is a piece of junk." The other might say "I can restore that." What follows are countless hours of refinishing, sanding, gluing, varnishing, and sawing new pieces of wood to replace fatigued ones until a finished product emerges and the chair is restored to its previous glory. Restoration is not an easy task. It is much easier to look at a used or neglected item and declare its uselessness instead of taking the time to restore it to its former glory.

In nature, restoration can seem not only time consuming but counterintuitive. My parents have a few raspberry bushes in their yard. When they first planted them, a friend told them to trim them back down (prune them) after the first year (and consecutively) in late winter right before they were to blossom again. This act of pruning seems counterintuitive, but it allows the plant to use its stored-up winter energy efficiently and grow back even bigger the second year. It is the second year that the fruiting canes of a raspberry bush produce the most fruit and pruning helps to ensure this.

The Lord came to Ezekiel the prophet during the time that the Israelites were exiled in Babylon. All of Judah had been destroyed and conquered along with the temple in Jerusalem. Not only physical damage but spiritual damage was afflicted upon the Israelites, and they were taken captive to a foreign place, Babylon. It seems as if God has abandoned them or that Babylon's gods are stronger than Yahweh. God's vision to Ezekiel is one of hope and restoration. The heap of dry bones, representing Israel and the fallen Judean soldiers, come together, and are restored before Ezekiel's eyes. God breaths life, Ruach, into the dry bones. The Hebrew word for spirit in the Old Testament, Ruach, is hard to translate but most accurately means "breath of life." God brought life into what was thought to be dead, even in exile.

In John, Jesus does a similar thing when he goes to find the dead body of Lazarus. Martha and Mary are crying rightly so at the death of their brother. He asks them to open the tomb even though they protest because of the stench and surely dead nature of Lazarus. Yet, Jesus has other plans and asks them to have faith. He then calls out "Lazarus, come out!" And Lazarus comes out of the tomb. Was Lazarus appreciative or did he have disdain for Jesus when he came out smelling like rotting flesh and probably a nasty headache.

How are we letting God resurrect our lives this Lenten season? We know this is not an easy task and that it requires effort on our parts. The breath of life from God can come at some of the most unexpected times. The spark of life from God is something that science can still not comprehend, yet as Christians we have faith in God's Ruach in our lives. May your week be fruitful as you contemplate what things in your life need to die this season in order for you to be restored to new and creative life as we walk this Christian journey together. Blessings!

Pastor Ryon