

I believe from time to time God gives us little glimpses of his power through what some people refer to as “coincidences”. They are not really coincidences, however. These events/visions/dreams/situations, whatever you want to call them, are God’s way of saying, “There is more to this life than meets the eye. I am closer than you think.”

Tony Campolo told of a time when he went to a small Pentecostal college to speak. He loved going to speak at this school because the people there seemed to be in touch with the power of the Holy Spirit. Before the service, several of the faculty members took him inside a room and prayed over him before he went out to talk to the student body. Tony said, “Pentecostals seem to pray longer and with more dynamism than we Baptists do. These men prayed long, and the longer they prayed the more they leaned on my head. They prayed on and on and on and leaned harder and harder. One of the faculty members prayed at length about a particular man named Charlie Stoltzfus. That kind of ticked me off, and I thought to myself, ‘If you’re going to lean on my head, the least you can do is pray for me.’ He prayed on and on for this guy who was about to abandon his wife and three children.”

Following the chapel service, Tony got in his car and headed home. As he was getting on the Pennsylvania turnpike he noticed a young man hitchhiking. He picked him up. Tony said, “I know you’re not supposed to, but I’m a Baptist preacher and whenever I can get someone locked in to where I can preach to him, I do it!” As they pulled back onto the highway, Tony introduced himself and asked the man what his name was. The man replied, “My name’s Charlie Stoltzfus...!” Tony turned the car around and headed back the other direction. Charlie said, “Where are you going!” “I’m taking you home,” Tony replied. “Home?” “Yes, home. Because you left your wife and three children.” When they got to the house Tony went inside and talked with the man and his wife. All stories don’t turn out this way, but would you believe that couple worked through their problems and Charlie became a Pentecostal preacher through the process!

I love stories like that because it proves not only that God has a sense of humor, but also that God can do just about anything he wants. How often do we forget that we serve a mighty God capable of anything?

May 20, 2007

Soren Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher who lived in the 1800's. He was a remarkable writer who contributed much to the Christian faith. He especially focused on the importance of commitment in the Christian life. He told a parable once about ducks. He described a town where only ducks live. Every Sunday the ducks waddle out of their homes and waddle down Main Street to their church. They waddle into the sanctuary and squat in their proper pews. The duck choir waddles in and takes its place, then the duck minister waddles forward and opens the duck Bible. He reads to them, "Ducks! God has given you wings! With wings you can fly! With wings you can mount up and soar like eagles! No walls can confine you! No fences can hold you! You have wings! God has given you wings and you can fly like birds!" All the ducks shouted, "Amen!" *And they all waddled home.*

Are we as individuals and churches sometimes a little like those ducks? We come into our sanctuaries Sunday after Sunday and hear over and over again the amazing stories of God's power and grace, only to waddle out with our heads down as if we have been defeated. If you walk out of here this morning feeling defeated it's your own fault. I don't know how anyone could feel defeated after hearing this story of the dry bones in Ezekiel.

God took Ezekiel to a valley of dry bones. Notice that God *took* Ezekiel. Ezekiel didn't ask to be transported to this graveyard. God decided it would happen so it happened. In this vision Ezekiel was placed in a valley where there were multitudes of very, dry bones. The image is that of an old battlefield where the remains of those who lost their lives still lay. We are told that the bones are very dry because God wanted to make sure Ezekiel knew that there was absolutely no life at all in these bones. Not one ounce of flesh remained. God asked Ezekiel, "Mortal, can these bones live?" Ezekiel replied, "O God, you know." This is one of those cases where we need audio to hear the tone of the response. Did Ezekiel mean, "O God, YOU KNOW!" as if to say, "Of course you can!" Or did Ezekiel say, "O God, you know." as if to say, "I'm not really sure but since you are God I guess you are the only one with the answer." Either way, Ezekiel sounded like a pretty good diplomat and would do well in any presidential debate in the United States!

The next thing you know it starts happening -- the bones come to life! One by one God connects each bone with muscle. Then God puts flesh on the bones and then skin. Suddenly a valley of dry dead bones is transformed

May 20, 2007

into a valley of human flesh, but still no life. At this point all we have are a bunch of bodies.

During class one day a professor once asked one of his unsuspecting students, "How long have you lived?" The student was surprised by the question and answered, "I'm twenty-two!" The professor replied, "I didn't ask how old you are. I asked how long have you **lived**."

I know some people whose bodies have been pumping blood for well over 80 and 90 years. I know others whose bodies have been pumping blood for two or three years, but the question of the day is, "How long have you lived?" Out of those 80 or 90 years or 20 or 30 or 40, how long have you lived in the joy of the Spirit? One of the saddest things is to meet someone who has existed for a long time yet never lived.

In Arthur Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman*, the main character is named Willy Loman. He led a tragic life that ended in suicide. At the graveside on a bleak and rainy day, the immediate family is huddled together along with friends. His wife laments over the casket, "Why? Why? Why? Why did you do it Willy?" It is then that Willy's son, Biff, speaks and says, "Aw, shucks, Mom. Aw, shucks. He had all the wrong dreams. He had all the wrong dreams." To be truly alive in Christ we have to have the right dreams and vision. It's one thing to be alive and another to be alive in Christ. Helen Keller was once asked if there was anything worse than being blind. She answered, "Oh, yes! There is something worse than being blind. It is being able to see and not having any vision."

Maybe that is us today. Maybe we need to listen to what God did with these lifeless bodies in the valley so that we can not just see, but have a vision of what God can do. God said to Ezekiel, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath, 'Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.'" Ezekiel did just as God commanded and suddenly there was life. And the next thing you know there is a vast multitude of people standing in the valley.

And to think that it all happened because God decided for it to happen. This is another case of God speaking things into being. Think back to the story of creation in Genesis. God spoke and things began to happen. God created something out of nothing -- the sun, the moon, the stars, the beautiful oceans, mountains, you and me. The dry bones didn't have

May 20, 2007

anything at all to do with coming to life. God didn't even consult with them as to whether or not it would be a good idea! God just decided to bring back to life something that was dead.

This is a powerful story because it says to you and me that when we have lost hope and feel spiritually dead all is not lost. The God who breathed life into the dry bones is the same God who can breathe life into you and me, and not just you and me as individuals, but our churches as well. The "vast multitude" of dry bones was resurrected together at once. I don't know what you have going on here at Eureka but I do know that God is in the mix, and that when God is breathing life into God's people all things are possible.

As far as what we should be doing as a church as God's resurrected people together, I offer this story to you about Karl Barth. Karl Barth was a great theologian who delivered one of the last lectures of his life at the University of Chicago Divinity School. At the end of the lecture, the president of the seminary told the audience that Dr. Barth was not well and was very tired, and that since he was tired he would only ask him one question on behalf of those in attendance. He looked at Dr. Barth and asked, "Of all the theological insights you have ever had, which do you consider to be the greatest of them all?"

That was quite a question to ask someone like Karl Barth. He wrote tens and thousands of pages of some of the most sophisticated theology every written in the history of the Christian church. The students sat there waiting in anticipation with pen and paper in hand. Barth closed his eyes and thought for a while. Then he smiled, opened his eyes, and said to the seminarians, "The greatest theological insight that I have ever had is this: Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so!"