**Sunday, January 10th, 2021**

**Ezekiel 37:1-14**

Walt Disney was a remarkable man of vision and faith in his dream.

He never gave up.

Early in his career, a newspaper fired him

          because they thought he had no good ideas.

This simply made Disney try harder.

When he was starting out in Kansas City he couldn't sell his cartoons.

Many people mocked him and hinted that he had no talent.

But Walt Disney had a dream and he was determined to fulfill it.

He found a minister who paid him a small amount

          to draw advertising pictures for his church.

He had no place to stay,

          so the church let him sleep in the mouse-infested garage.

Disney nicknamed one of those mice "Mickey".

The early days were tough.

But Walt refused to give up.

Eventually, he formed a business.

Whenever he presented some unbelievable dream he was entertaining,

          the members of his company would shake their heads,

          and stare back at him in disbelief.

But Disney did not give up.

He continued to invest his time, his creative energy, and everything he had.

He never lost faith in his dream of what could be.

And he never forgot his little friend, Mickey Mouse.

Out of the ruins of Jerusalem came a prophet named Ezekiel.

He was among the Jews taken to Babylon after the fall of his country.

He left behind his city.

He left behind his Temple.

He left behind his home.

But he never left behind his faith and trust in God.

He announced it to everyone who would listen, and those who would not.

God had a great plan for his people.

A great city, where justice would reign and worship would be restored.

Ezekiel had great faith in God,

          and preached a message of hope to the exiles in Babylon.

But the people were as unresponsive as dead bones.

They had lost their faith, and turned away from God, and worshiped idols.

Their home was hundreds of miles away.

The beautiful city of Jerusalem was a pile rubbish.

The marvelous temple was destroyed.

And the people lost all hope.

They believed life would never be good again.

God took Ezekiel to a large valley filled with dry dead bones.

It was a dry place – there was no joy there.

It was a dead place – there was no life there.

It was a place of darkness – there was no hope there.

Then God asked Ezekiel, "Can these bones live?"

There seemed to be no way these dead, dried up bones could live again.

And yet, Ezekiel knew God was able to do amazing things

          which appeared to be impossible.

Then God him told Ezekiel: "Prophesy to these bones.

          Say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.' "

And Ezekiel obeyed.

As Ezekiel watched, a miracle of life took place.

Where before only dead dry bones had littered the landscape,

          the Lord added muscles, tendons, and skin.

And into those restored, silent bodies, God breathed new life, a new spirit.

Those dry, dead bones came to life and stood up on their feet -- a vast army.

The dry bones represented the Jewish people, who were scattered

          throughout the world without any hope of a land of their own.

As the prophet sat in the middle of a valley, he knew that only a miracle

          could bring together his scattered, hopeless people.

The dry bones in the valley were a picture of the spiritual condition

          of God's people.

And it would be as difficult for the people to turn back to their God,

          as it was for dead bones to return to life.

Instead of living their lives according to God's will,

          they flocked to sin like moths to a bright light.

Their love for sinful thoughts, words, and actions,

          took the spiritual life out of them.

They lived like their pagan neighbors for so long,

          that in time they became just like them – a lifeless pile of dry bones.

God showed Ezekiel that someday the Jewish people would come back to Israel.

They would return to their homes, and they would listen to God.

And it would happen when they began to hear and obey

          the word of the Lord.

Although we are separated from Ezekiel by at least 2500 years,

          the message the Lord gave to him in the valley of dead bones

          still applies to us.

We, too, often become distracted, neglect God's teachings,

          and forget to listen to Him.

We become discouraged by all the evil around us.

We worry and fret about all the problems in our lives.

But when we turn again to God, we find hope, and peace, and life.

With God our hopelessness can turn into joy.

God gave Ezekiel a message to deliver.

God wanted to live with his people.

He wanted to make his home in the center of their city,

          and in the center of their lives.

He had great plans for the happiness of his people.

And the time would come when his plans would bear much fruit.

The vision God gave Ezekiel did not occur immediately.

Changing the thoughts of the people took time.

But Ezekiel was able to continue being the prophet for the people,

          because God had given him a vision and hope.

God has also given us this vision.

When our lives seem to be filled with confusion, doubt, and fear,

          we remember:

                    God is with us.

                    God loves us.

                    God will never abandon us.

AMEN