

Pentecost

DISASTER RESPONSE

Day of Pentecost

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Analysis by Chris Repp

1The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. 3He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." 4Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 5Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 6I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD." 7So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. 9Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." 10I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. 11Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' 12Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up

from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 14I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act," says the LORD.

Prefatory remarks: As I sit down to consider this text, my town and several others along a 40-mile strip of southern Illinois have been devastated by a powerful storm, which some are calling an "inland hurricane." Sustained winds of 90 miles per hour, with gusts as high as 106, have wreaked havoc on trees, homes, businesses, and infrastructure. All of that makes this a rather specific and introspective analysis of the text. But I shall trust in your powers of abstraction to make use of it for your own contexts.

DIAGNOSIS: Down and Out

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : Devastated

Big limbs down, trees uprooted, utility poles snapped in two, power lines down. Here and there roofs are damaged, windows knocked out. Toward the center of town, some older homes have been more severely damaged by older, bigger trees. To be sure, this is not, in the big picture, the same as being conquered by an invading army and shipped off into exile in a foreign country. And it is only the mildest taste of the real disasters that regularly befall people in our own time throughout the world – from New Orleans to Bangladesh to Darfur, Pakistan, Szechwan Province, Chechnya, Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, and on and on. And then there are the more personal disasters of illness, failed marriages, broken friendships, unemployment.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : Dispirited

Even in the midst of minor disasters it's not hard to become discouraged. A garden lopper is simply not up to the task of removing a pine tree that has fallen on our car. A neighbor with a chainsaw helped us with that, and another with part of a tree down in the back yard. But the one out front is beyond the capacity of amateurs to deal with. Treasures of food stored up in refrigerator and freezer are as good as moth-eaten or stolen (cf. Mt. 6:19). We complain and feel sorry for ourselves, and share our misery with our friends and neighbors. We feel as though we've had the wind knocked out of us. How much more dispiriting for those suffering greater disasters.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Cut off*

The worst, though, is being cut off. No power. No phone. No cable TV. No internet! How much worse must it be for those who endure war, famine, flood, occupation, and grinding poverty – cut off even from family, food, and emergency care? We at least have working cell phones and cars. We can escape to stay with family who has the conveniences that we count on. But our disconnectedness – whether substantial or trivial – sheds light on a deeper disconnect, one shared by our Israelite forebears. Long before the disaster of defeat and exile, the people of Israel had turned to idolatry and cut themselves off from God. Like them, we have turned to our own idols: money, power, status, beauty. Mired in sinful selfishness, we too have cut ourselves off from God.

PROGNOSIS: Up and Running

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Reconnected*

Electrical crews were out in force in the immediate aftermath of the storm, and more were summoned in the following days from nearby and as far away as Michigan. Large batches of new utility poles were shipped in, those rows of crosses that bear power to us from their sources. In a similar way, God sends in emergency

crews to get us reconnected. We call them prophets, bearing of the word of Lord GOD. But the disaster was more than they could handle. And so the Word itself must come – the supreme lineman – and ascend the pole for us. At the cost of his own life, the Word-made-flesh reconnects us to the source of life.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *In-spired*

Once the lines had been reconnected, the “juice” could be switched on, and we could get back to business as usual. Back on the fifth Sunday of Easter we heard Jesus use an analogous metaphor of vines and branches and fruit. When the branches are connected to the vine, the juices flow and fruit is produced. But the fruit of this vine is not meant for “business as usual.”

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Alive and grounded*

The lights are back on. Cable TV and internet are restored. Now we are reconnected, if only virtually, to a world where real disaster continues for millions. But we who have been reconnected to the source of life have the opportunity and honor of being a part of God’s disaster-response team, charged with the task of bringing light and life to all people, and the knowledge that God has acted and continues to act in the world God so loves.