Tree symbol: some bones

[We are going to trace the stories of the Jesse Tree right up through the branches of the people who carried the story of God's love. Now we have reached the branches of the prophets and dreamers, who said that the future need not be like the past.]

Jeremiah the prophet told the king who lived in Jerusalem that the king would lose the war that he was fighting and that many of his people would be captured and taken off to live in a foreign land as prisoners. Everything that Jeremiah had said would happen, happened. One of the people who was taken as a prisoner to a foreign land was a young man called Ezekiel. There, in that distant land, Ezekiel became a prophet too. Sometimes God came close to Ezekiel by giving him a special kind of dream called a vision. Ezekiel would see a story happening in his head and this story would help him to understand what God was saying to him. One day Ezekiel had an amazing vision that he would remember all his life.

Ezekiel was sitting and praying. Suddenly, he felt as if he was picked up from the ground and whirled away on a journey through the sky. In his mind, Ezekiel saw himself coming to rest in a large valley. There were piles of something on the ground in front of him – piles which were taller than he was. What were the piles made of? In the vision, Ezekiel walked right up to one of them. Was it a pile of wood or a pile of bricks? No, it was a pile of dry bones! Ezekiel walked right around it. These were human bones. 'How many human beings must have died to have left all these bones?' thought Ezekiel. Then God spoke. He said, 'Human being, can these bones live?' Ezekiel did not know what to say. The bones were very dry; he did not think that they could ever live again. On the other hand, this was God asking the question and God could do things which seemed impossible.

Ezekiel decided to avoid answering God's question, so he said, 'Only you know, O Lord.' Then God told him to speak to the bones, to preach to them and tell them that God was going to make them live. It seemed a very strange thing to do, but Ezekiel wanted to obey God, so he began to preach to the bones and to tell them that God was going to make them alive once more.

Ezekiel took a deep breath and spoke loudly enough for all the bones to hear him. When he paused to take another breath, he heard a rattling sound. The rattling got louder and louder, and then Ezekiel could see the bones beginning to move. He was frightened in case the piles fell right over on top of him, but then he realised that the bones were not falling to the ground, they were somehow joining up with each other. They were
making whole bodies again! When each set of bones was complete, with legs and arms and a back and a head, the body grew muscles and skin. After a few minutes, a whole crowd of people were sitting in front of Ezekiel. They were very quiet and still; they were sitting up, but they did not seem to be fully alive.

Then God told Ezekiel to speak to the wind and tell the breath of life to come into these people. So Ezekiel began, ‘This is what God says: come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these people so that they will live.’ There was a sighing sound as all the people breathed in at once. Then there was a rumble as all the people got to their feet and stood looking at Ezekiel. Ezekiel was thrilled and a little scared. Who would have thought that all these people could live again by hearing the words that God had told him to speak?

The vision began to fade and God spoke to Ezekiel about it. ‘These bones are my people,’ said God. ‘My people have lost all hope and they feel as if they are dried-out bones. Ezekiel, you must speak to them and tell them that I will give them my breath and they will live. I will raise them up, just as these bones came back to life, and I will bring them back to their own land to live.’

Ezekiel always remembered this vision. It encouraged him to tell the people the things God wanted them to hear. For, after all, hearing a word from God brought new life even to dried-out bones.

[We hang a symbol of some bones on the tree for Ezekiel, to remember the visions and dreams which God gave him and the way he explained them to the people.]

A moment to wonder

I wonder if Ezekiel found it hard to live in a foreign land?

A prayer

As green as a healthy tree, the story of God’s love keeps growing. We remember Ezekiel, who saw visions and explained them to the people. We pray for everyone who has new ideas for the future. Amen.