

What can our spiritual dry bones teach us? Can these bones live?

When you are in a book shop of any kind, have you ever noticed how many self-help books are in the bookcases there? I went into Whitcoulls in Westfield at Newmarket on Thursday to have a look and there were 9 shelves of books. Everything from “The Myth of Normal to 8 Rules of Love, What Women Want to Finding Calm.” There are all sorts of titles in there. It is a market that’s worth in excess of 22 billion New Zealand Dollars a year, so obviously people are interested in helping themselves. Mind you I’m not so sure that titles like “Live Younger Longer, How to Leave your Psychopath and Tinder Translator” really help anyone!

But certainly, self-help is a thing, a big thing.

So, I want to offer you some serious biblical self-help. Self-help as the bible teaches it.

When we read both the first and second testaments, hopefully we are struck by a continuing theme. That of remembering. Early on in Genesis, Judges, Deuteronomy, and in numerous places, when something significant occurs, a memorial stone is laid down so that the people passing by or returning there, will remember.

When the huge events of the biblical story occur, the Exodus; Out of Egypt; the cry is, remember me. The Exile; Out of Babylon, the cry is, remember me. The Eucharist; Out of darkness, the cry is, remember me, every week in the celebration of Holy Communion.

This is serious Biblical self-help. The cry to remember me.

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In our first testament reading we have a huge valley of lifeless bones. A valley of death, dryness, and decay. We have a valley of dead bones, a valley in which at the word of the Lord, these dry and decayed bones become bodies of flesh, then at another word, these bodies become beings filled with breath.

This is the people of Israel, Yahweh says. They say “their bones are dried up, our hope is lost, we are cut off.” Therefore, prophesy and speak to them.”

In some of our other Lenten readings we have also seen Yahweh speak, and into the silence of death, is given the shout of life. That this is what life is. This is what God is about. Freedom from sin and death.

This is the people of Israel, the people that grumble that they have no food, no water, who cry out with the question, “Surely, we aren’t blind, are we?”

This is the people of Israel who don’t “remember me.”

Who don’t recognise the raising of Lazarus. Who don’t get that if “we died with Christ, we will also live with him.” Who don’t remember Exodus. Don’t remember Exile. Don’t remember the Eucharist, and what that does for us all.

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No, they can’t live. And they can teach us nothing ... if we ignore the “the cry to remember me.”

Remembering is the biggest kind of biblical self-help. Remembering the big things; Exodus. Exile. Eucharist. But what about our own dry bone's places? Our own difficult times? What about our own dark nights of the soul?

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Have we ever faced things that seemed impossible to overcome? Periods of time when we were depressed, or lonely, stricken with grief or overcome by fear? Experienced hopelessness or anxiety?

How did we survive these things? Did we see God in any way during these times? In passing through our darkness, our night of the soul, as we look back and remember ... was God in those times with us and for us? Was there strength available to us in any of it, comfort? As we look back and remember, can we see any help that may have been there for us?

This is the serious biblical self-help of remembering. God, present in our darkness. For if God was present once ... God will be present again.

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Lent eventually leads us to the three great days of Easter, and as we wait to get there, we reflect, ponder, and think, my encouragement is that we all indulge in a little bit of serious biblical self-help ... and do some remembering.

Because when we come upon those great three days ... these and all of our questions are answered ... in a mighty shout ...

Christ is risen ... He is risen indeed!

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Remember me!

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Yes, they most certainly can!

Amen.