

*Friends, sometimes when we hear or read these stories of Ezekiel and the dry bones or Jesus and Lazarus' resuscitation we think they are beautiful metaphors. Beautiful, powerful images of stories in a book—captive to their pages.. But they aren't just images, they aren't just stories. This resurrection business that God is engaged in, especially now in Christ, is real. Resurrection is the real stuff of our lives. It is new life. And it didn't just happen once, it is happening all the time.*

*I hope this morning as we listen to the text and stories of lives around us, we might begin to see what Resurrection is...*

### **Ezekiel 37:1-6**

The 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. <sup>2</sup>He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. <sup>3</sup>He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." <sup>4</sup>Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. <sup>5</sup>Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup>I 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."

### ***Enfield, Connecticut***<sup>1</sup>

Four men stand together in a grassy field watching four, happy (that might be redundant) Labradors romp together, chasing tails, sniffing the grass and enjoying the spring sun.

Ordinarily you might mistake these four men for proud dog owners; but when you look closer the surrounding chain link fence topped with barbed wire and the matching grey pants and white shirts give you a different answer. These men are inmates at the Enfield Correctional Institution, a medium security prison in Enfield, Connecticut. They are part of a program "where they work with the non-profit organization America's VetDogs to train service animals that will help wounded military veterans and others suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder."

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.today.com/series/veterans/prison-inmates-train-service-dogs-help-military-veterans-t109562> all quotations are directly from the article

Tyrel, an inmate up for parole next year says working with this program gives him hope for his future and skills he may be able to use for a job as a dog trainer. "It definitely makes me feel a lot better about myself, because after committing a crime, being in here you sometimes feel like everybody looks at you like being condemned," he commented, "It gives me confidence that everyone hasn't given up on me."

In the past, the usual time for a veteran to wait for a service dog has been up to 5 years. Wounded veterans were returning faster than dogs could be trained. But because inmates can work with the dogs daily, that wait time has been cut down to 2 years. The dogs sleep in cages right beside the inmates' bunk beds in their dorm-like cells.

Another inmate, Gerard, is seeing the benefit of being in the America's Vet Dogs program while he serves his time. "Just knowing that you need to guide this dog, you need to develop this dog into something kind of more than you," Gerard says. "This dog is going to become more than the program; it's going to do more than just what's written down on the pieces of paper. This dog is going to essentially change someone's life."

Indeed it has. U.S. Army veteran David Cameron, who received a dog named Disco from the program, wrote a letter thanking the prison. "This amazing dog instantly gave me a sense of security that I never felt before," Cameron wrote. "Within a week I stopped taking sleeping pills that I had been using every night for almost three years. He helped me to open up to people and talk to strangers who I previously would have just avoided eye contact with." Disco has become such an important member of our family, and I don't know what I would do without him."

Mark Tyler, the director of America's VetDogs who works with the Enfield prison program, says, "I hate the clichés that are thrown around, but this truly is a win-win program for everybody involved."

### Ez. 37:11-14

<sup>11</sup>Then 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.'

<sup>12</sup>Therefore prophesy, 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. <sup>13</sup>And you shall know that I am the

Lord, when I open **your graves**, and bring you up from **your graves**, O my people. <sup>14</sup>I 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.

### ***Abilene, Texas***<sup>2</sup>

Ginger Marshall loved her momma. They were quite close as mothers and daughters can often be. Ginger regularly thought of how when her mother died, she lost her best friend. But that is just how it is sometimes. *Dying is part of the bargain of living* - that's what her daddy always said now, with a reminiscent tear in his eye.

Ginger grew up in West Texas where home remedies existed before CVS, Walgreens and WebMD. Mosquito bite? Break open a cigarette and put a lump of wet tobacco on it. Got a nasty cough that you can't get rid of? Vicks vapor rub on your soles of your feet when you go to bed. When her mother died, many home remedies went with her. Her mother was a depression era child; so in their house as Ginger grew up, nothing was wasted. The basement was stocked with canned beans, greens and figs; and a ham bone will make any bowl of pintos a lot better.

Ever resourceful, Ginger's mother had always seen to make her own household cleaners even before chemicals in your home could cause cancer in a lab rat. Ginger remembered a book she had given her mother 15 years earlier with all sorts of home remedies in it. Her mother would call her in the afternoon and tell her the latest remedy she'd read about and list the things Ginger needed to buy. Wanting to keep her mother's memory close to her, Ginger set out to find that same book. It was no longer with her mother's possessions having either been given away or sold in a yard sale.

Ginger searched Amazon, but the problem was she couldn't remember the name of the book. She scrolled through page after page of the 100's of books on Amazon's website that fell under the category of home remedies. Feeling defeated she stopped searching and picked a random book from Amazon and placed her order for a used copy. Seven days later the book arrived

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.today.com/news/how-one-woman-s-memory-her-mom-s-home-remedies-t109714>

and Ginger sat down to thumb through the pages feeling as though she had not picked the right one; she wasn't sure it was even the one she'd been searching for.

As she looked at the different entries for cleaning this or fixing that, a handwritten note fell out. It was a small slip of notebook paper containing a note about "Granny's lye soap, and how in the process of making it, it would stink to high heaven." Ginger smiled to herself saying that the note sounded like something her mother would say.

*(I had a grandmother that grew up in Texas so I can attest that Texan grandmother's say those kinds of things.)* And as Ginger say there thinking about that note, she noticed how it looked a lot like her mother's own handwriting.

Her hands started shaking a little. She thumbed through the book some more. Then another note fell out. It was a note about making may haw jelly and where to find the right ingredients - right from her mother's home town. Ginger knew without a doubt that somehow she had purchased the same book she had given her mother a decade and half before.

Ginger cried tears of joy over the odds of finding the exact same book; a coincidence she calls a God-wink. Perhaps with God there are no odds perhaps it is just God's powerful assurance, a way of God speaking beyond the grave.

### John 11:17-27

<sup>17</sup>When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup>Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, <sup>19</sup>and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. <sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." <sup>23</sup>Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup>Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." <sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life.** Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup>and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup>She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

### ***Palmetto, Georgia***<sup>3</sup>

68 years ago, Mr. Johnny Jennings was 18 years old. He wasn't wealthy, heck he was just starting out. But this boy from Palmetto, Georgia a small town of around 5,000 in Fulton County was about to have his life changed. Mr. *18 years old* Johnny Jennings found himself in the hall way of the Georgia Baptist Children's Home, a refuge for children from troubling situations. Over the years the services they provided have changed to adapt to the needs of the children, but their mission has remained the same; to help promote the spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being of children, youth and their families.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Johnny, as he's affectionately now called, recalls that 68 years ago, as they were leaving the home, three young boys ran and grabbed him by the legs asking to be adopted. "Will you be my daddy?" they begged, and Johnny looked down at them and said, "I'll do what I can." That took my heart right there, Mr. Johnny recalls. It was in fact in that moment that Mr. Johnny Jennings saw his life's mission.

Mr. Johnny wasn't ready to adopt any children just yet and he didn't have a lot of money, few 18 year olds do. But he knew he had to help. So Mr. Johnny Jennings started collecting scrap paper, cardboard, and aluminum and then cashing it in for money. That may not sound like it would amount to a whole lot, but in the past 30 years, Mr. Johnny has given over \$400, 000 to the home. He is the cornerstone of the children's community.

"Johnny Jennings is one of the most gracious individuals I have ever met," Georgia Baptist Children's Home President Dr. Kenneth Thompson explains. "I have always admired his quiet, humble spirit, his commitment to helping others and most of all, his love for the children in our care."

Mr. Johnny used to have to go and find the paper and scrap metal. But now that people know about what he does, people find him. Folks bring bags from their collection at church, their offices, and personal lives. He even collected and saved pennies, *get ready for this...24 miles worth of pennies.* That's right, 24 miles worth. How many pennies are in a mile, you might ask? Well, 84,480 is a mile worth of pennies. Lots of those pennies were collected

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.today.com/news/86-year-old-donates-400-000-worth-paper-aluminum-children-t108750>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/pg/GBCHFM/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/GBCHFM/about/?ref=page_internal)

in Mr. Johnny's church. So the church decided to bring some children from the home and let them see Mr. Johnny's face as he hands the \$20,275.20 check to Dr. Thompson. The kids said Mr. Johnny's face shines as bright as his red suspenders.

### John 11:33-44

<sup>33</sup>When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. <sup>34</sup>He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." <sup>35</sup>Jesus began to weep. <sup>36</sup>So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" <sup>37</sup>But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" <sup>38</sup>Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup>Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." <sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup>So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. <sup>42</sup>I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." <sup>43</sup>When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup>The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

### ***Oxford, Alabama***<sup>5</sup>

Derrick Taylor has get up early and walks 5 miles to get to his job at the UPS hub in Oxford. I don't know about you, but I don't know many 19 year olds who get up at 4am for anything. But Taylor's mother's health isn't the best, so he helps out the only way he knows how. He's been working since he was 14. His coworkers describe him as hardworking and loyal; both to his family and to his job.

Proud too. He's a proud young man. In fact sometimes too proud. His coworkers have often stopped and tried to give him rides, but he politely declines and keeps walking. 10 miles, round trip, day in and day out; walking and working.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.today.com/news/co-workers-buy-car-teen-ups-employee-who-walks-10-t108762>

One day, the shift supervisor calls him out the parking lot past the break tables. The early morning chill is still in the air, it's only 8:30. Taylor is a little suspicious, seems like everyone is on break right now. Jameson, the supervisor makes Derrick stand in the middle of the circle. Now he's really suspicious. It wasn't his birthday. Was it a work anniversary? Derrick tries to remember when he started working at UPS.

But then Jameson starts talking about what a hard worker Derrick is. "He makes me emotional, so don't nobody laugh at me in the back," Jameson starts tearing up. "This young man wants to work so bad, he's committed to walk to work." Everybody around him is getting emotional. "We all chipped in and got you something," Jameson tells Derrick. It happens so fast, Derrick doesn't have time to think.

His shift supervisor pulls keys from his pocket and points. And there it is. Washed, waxed, shiny, new.

You got a new ride," Derrick hears the words in a fog. **His coworkers** have chipped in and bought him a car. He's overwhelmed. He can't believe it. His, 10 mile walking, 19 year old self, crumbles in to a pile tears. "I am more than thankful and appreciative for what my coworkers have done for me. They are a blessing and I'll never be able to thank them enough. I'll never forget it." That what Derrick Taylor writes on the video of him getting a car that has been viewed over 4 million times.

(Ez. 37:13-14-do not have to say out loud where this verse is)

<sup>13</sup>And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup>I 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.

(John 11:45-do not have to say out loud where this verse is)

<sup>45</sup>Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

### **Hickory, NC**

A young boy has a headache and it worries his parents, so they schedule an MRI. Upon further review, it is the worst news possible, cancer. So the church rallies; the community rallies. They pray, they spread the word. They send

care packages and buy gas cards so the family can be together. It is a long hard 8 months. But that little boy, now he's cancer free and he will hopefully come home this week.

### ***Hickory, NC***

A dying man receives a prayer shawl for his sagging shoulders and his wife decides that a prayer shawl is just the thing they needed. Feeling surrounded by prayers in a tangible, warm way? Others might need this kind of thing too, she determines. So she knits, well actually her hands don't seem to like knitting, so she crochets prayer shawls - sometimes over a 100 in one year. She starts a group at her church and hopes it will continue. It is her offering, her ministry, her prayer. There's one in my office with her name stitched in it - she's right, others of us do need them.

### ***Hickory, NC***

The year is 1968. A young family builds a home on a beautiful street. It is a house to be proud of, enough space and bedrooms for the 3 of them. But again the unthinkable happens 2 years later, the husband is diagnosed with cancer. They worry. Oh they worry. To say this diagnosis was unexpected is to put it lightly. Does anyone ever expect this kind of tragedy? They have been pinching every penny just live in this new home on such a fine street.

When he dies, they know this young mother won't have a huge pension to cash in; she won't receive a big lump sum from the life insurance check. How will they get by? She worries, though she doesn't say it out loud, she worries as mothers do. But then a wonderful thing happens. Friends and neighbors, deacons and the elders; well this wonderful thing happened. The church decided it will be the church that lives the resurrection. And in 1972, right before Thanksgiving, this family is assured though awful now, things will be okay. They are assured there is new life. The church hands them the deed to their house, Thanksgiving indeed.

*Do you hear Christ calling us out of our graves? Do you feel God's Spirit rushing in, sweeping over you to revive your very bones again? Do you feel the Spirit of this Resurrecting God giving us new life? Because this is what I believe Resurrection is, in Connecticut, in Texas, in Georgia, in Alabama, in Hickory. In you and in me. Amen.*