

What would be your dream job? Can you imagine having a job working for the Queen of England? In February 2018, Britain's royal family posted a job ad for a Digital communications officer to manage the social media account for Queen Elizabeth II. For £30,000 per year—about \$38,000 U.S.—the Digital communications officer will post articles, videos and photos about the Queen's state visits and royal business on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

The Queen has a worldwide following on social media. And she has a certain image to uphold. It would be a huge responsibility to be the spokesperson for the Queen, or for any major public figure. What qualifications would get the job? In addition to social media experience and a college degree, the royal job ad said the Queen was looking for someone "innovative and with creative flair" who would do their job as part of a "fast-paced and dynamic team."

Do you think God chose Ezekiel to be His prophet to the nation of Israel because he was innovative and had a creative flair? I doubt it. God seems to choose His servants based on their obedience, not their skill set. And we know Ezekiel wasn't part of a "fast-paced and dynamic team." No, the job of prophet is probably the loneliest job on earth. And dangerous too. In fact, if you want to test my theory, then this week try finishing every sentence with the words, ". . . in accordance with prophecy," and see how quickly people want to punch you. All kidding aside, no one wants to hear hard truths. No one wants to be told that they are sinful and rebellious and on the wrong side of God's will. There's an old story about Moishe, a medieval Jewish astrologer who prophesied that the king's favorite horse would die soon. Sure enough, the horse died a short time later. The king got angry at Moishe, certain that his prophecy had brought about the horse's death. He summoned Moishe and commanded him, "Prophet, tell me when you will die!" Moishe realized that the king was planning to kill him immediately no matter what answer he gave, so he had to answer carefully. "I do not know when I will die," he answered. "I only know that whenever I die, the king will die three days later." Guess what? Moishe lived a long life.

Prophets have one job: to speak for God. And sometimes God has some uncomfortable things to say to us. When a person is freezing to death, he feels a pleasant numbness that he does not want to end. He just goes to sleep as he is freezing to death. But when heat is applied, and the blood begins rushing into the affected areas, pain immediately occurs. Though it hurts, the pain is indicative of rescue and cure. God sends a prophet to people who are cold in their relationship with God—spiritually freezing to death—though they want to stay that way. The prophet turns the heat on, and they become angry with him when he is actually working to make them better.

So instead of viewing prophets as killjoys, what if we should view them as symbols of hope. Because if God had given up on His people, He wouldn't send a prophet. He wouldn't send anybody. **If God sends a prophet, that means there is still hope.** Ezekiel comes during the Babylonian Captivity. Can you imagine being a refugee, living in poverty in a strange land? Your center of worship has been destroyed. Your community has been scattered. Where is your family? Where are your neighbors? How do you rebuild your life when everything has been taken away from you? Their life was in their worship, in their identity as God's chosen people. Did this mean that God had

ended His covenant with the nation of Israel? Had the people lost their very identity as the people of the One True God? God sent Ezekiel to these desperate and broken people to answer that very question. God asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”

Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’” The bones came together, bone to bone. he looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophecy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.’” Ezekiel brought a word of hope in a hopeless time.

In 1665, the bubonic plague swept through the city of London. In his book *A Journal of the Plague Year*, Daniel Defoe described the devastation we would have seen if we walked the streets of London back then. People who had the means to escape the city did so. Others barricaded themselves in their houses. More than 1500 people died each day. Bodies were piled up in open pits because there wasn’t enough ground or enough grave diggers to give the dead a proper burial. Sounds like places in the Middle East today. Defoe writes that men roamed the streets, prophesying God’s coming destruction on the city. One prophet wandered naked through the streets chanting, “Oh, the great and dreadful God! Oh, the great and dreadful God . . .” Is that what Ezekiel wanted to say when he stood in the Valley of Dry Bones? “O, the great and dreadful God!” Maybe so. It was a terrible time.

David Guzik, in his *Enduring Word Commentary*, writes that Jews insisted on a proper burial for their dead as a way to honor them. So an unburied body was a sign of shame, of disgrace. This was a time of fear, heartbreak and shame for Israel. And then God asks Ezekiel the strangest question: “Son of Man, can these bones live?” Why even ask the question at this point? Why does God try to interject hope in our most hopeless times? When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden and hid themselves from God, God killed an animal and fashioned clothes for them to cover their shame. When Abram and Sarai had reached their golden years without having children, God promised them a son and delivered to them Isaac. When Esther was a teenage bride in a foreign kingdom, God gave her the courage to stand up to a heartless king and save her people. In hopeless situations, God keeps giving His people hope.

So where is the hope in the Valley of Dry Bones? **We find our hope in this: God**

always keeps His promises. If God tells you that things are going to turn out all right, trust Him for God always keeps His promises.

Ezekiel was confronted with a challenging situation, wasn't he? These weren't people with a future. These were dry bones. And God is calling Ezekiel to prophesy to them. As someone who was called to preach God's word, I can tell you it is hard enough to prophesy to living people. You may have a hard time believing this, but there are some hardheaded people in churches sometimes who don't want to listen to a word from the Lord. Why prophesy to dry bones? The power wasn't in Ezekiel's prophesy; the power was in Ezekiel's obedience. The power was in the promises of God.

So Ezekiel begins to prophesy to the dry bones. And God begins to speak through him. And those bodies came to life and stood on their feet and assembled themselves into a vast army. Not a crowd. Not a mob. An army. An army has a purpose. An army has an allegiance. An army has unity and power, a goal and a mission.

And God explains to Ezekiel that this Valley of Dry Bones represents the nation of Israel. They were dead, hopeless and cut off from the power of God. But they will not remain that way. No matter how circumstances look now, no matter what the history books or the politicians or the pundits say, listen to what God says: "My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord." God will keep His promises to them.

But when did God first make those promises to the nation of Israel? Way back in Genesis 12 when God told an old, childless man named Abram to leave his country and his people and go to a land that the Lord would show him. And this was God's promise that first gave life to the nation of Israel: "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." How would that happen? When God sent His Son, Jesus, through the lineage of Abraham and the nation of Israel, to make a new covenant in his blood that would offer salvation and new life to all peoples on earth (Luke 22). That's why you and I are here today. We are included in God's promises too.

On Sept. 4, 2012, Alex Sheen's father died. Most people would describe Alex's father as an "average" man. But Alex describes him as a man of his word. At his father's funeral, Alex passed out small cards to everyone in attendance. He called them Promise Cards. At the bottom of each card were the words "Because I said I would." His father lived by those words. He could always be counted on to keep his promises. In honor of his father, Alex challenged those in attendance at the funeral to write a promise on their card and to make a steadfast commitment to keep that promise.

The people at Mr. Sheen's funeral were so inspired by Alex's Promise Cards that he began printing more and sending them for free to anyone who requested them. Today, Alex Sheen runs a nonprofit that does character education programming in schools, colleges and prisons. He teaches about integrity and honor and character, and yes, keeping your promises. And his organization has sent more than 11 million Promise Cards to people in over 150 countries. Think of all the times you have made promises to be with family and weren't, maybe now is the time to pick up the phone because they

are probably home. To those who can how many times have you promised to give blood but didn't well, now is the tie it is needed. How many times have you promised to help those in need, there are many ways of doing it now like sewing masks. God keeps his promises, we should too.

God will never forget His promises. God will never forget His people. Across every page of the Bible, God writes His promises and signs them with "Because I said I would."

Listen to the promises God made through Ezekiel. To His people who were dead and hopeless and cut off, He will give new life and new hope. He will bring them back to their home again and put His Spirit within them. He will turn death into life. He will turn a valley of dry bones into the army of God. How do we know this? Because He said He would. "Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord." As we move through this Easter season, remember that God is not done keeping His promises to His people. God is faithful and God's plans are eternal. And we, as God's people, can base our lives and our hope on the promises of God.

II

From Fr Joseph Pellegrino

The gripping drama of the rising of Lazarus points towards Jesus as the Lord of Life and prepares us for the celebration of our sharing in His Life at Easter.

However, this gospel is more than this. It is a call for to consider if we are in a tomb. This gospel asks us to hear the voice of the Lord calling us to shore up our courage and to come out of our tombs. We are called to come into the Light. We are called to come to the Life. The gospel calls us to walk to the Lord.

We often put ourselves in tombs. There are times that we feel very dead, particularly dead to the Lord. When we are in this spiritual malaise, we do not want to reflect on our lives. We play a game with the Lord and ultimately with our eternal existence. The game is this: If we do not think about what we have done or are doing to ourselves, then we can attempt to overlook our situation. Only, we cannot really do that, can we? We can fool others into thinking that we are happy, but we cannot fool ourselves.

So, we get involved in things that are negative, nasty, and sinful. We tell others that we are happy with this life. We try to convince ourselves that we are happy with our lives. But we have a difficult time looking into the mirror. We have an even more difficult time walking into a church. And we have a horrible time taking God inside of us, or simply sitting before Him in the Blessed Sacrament.

We try to blame others. We make believe that they have put us into the tomb. For example, others have said, "You don't know what you are missing. Drink this. Take that. Do this. Do that. You will be happy. Loosen up! You are the only one at the party who is not drinking. Everybody is taking X now, why do you think you are so different? Of course we have sex; you're the only one I know who doesn't." And with a group around us, with our defenses down perhaps due to various difficulties in

our lives we say, “No big deal. I should try this. I should do that. Everybody else is.” Then, the next day, if not sooner, we feel rotten, dirty, even dead. We can blame others for putting us into the tomb, but ultimately, we did it to ourselves. We chose sin and suffer from it.

There are also times that we race into a tomb completely on our own, without the temptation of others. We convince ourselves that this or that is not going to hurt us so much. And we go places where a Christian does not belong, be those places in the world or within our own rooms, or we do things to ourselves that frustrate ourselves, and then we feel dead.

“Come out, Lazarus!”

Jesus is calling us. We are all Lazaruses. He is calling us to come out of the darkness, and come into His Light. He is calling us to come out of the place of death and come into His Life. In his second book on Jesus, Pope Benedict XVI points out that the early Christians referred to themselves as *The Living*. That is what we are called to be, alive in an otherwise dead world.

Out of the tomb, into the light, out of the tomb, into His Life we experience indescribable joy. We are one with Jesus. We are at peace. We no longer view others as threats to our happiness. No, others become a road to happiness as we serve the presence of God within them. Out of the tomb, away from our sins, we see others as unique reflections of God, as people who can bring us to a deeper understanding of God’s love.

So, we ask ourselves today, “Am I happy with myself? Am I comfortable with my life? Am I happy with my relationship with God?” Those questions are just different ways of asking the same thing: “Am I alive, or am I dead?” Or, perhaps, “Is there something that is killing me?” Maybe, our relationship with others is pretty bad, and we tend to get nasty rather easily. Maybe we have friends that we try to impress by flaunting our sexuality, by joining them in drinking and drugs. We do our best to ignore the dying we feel within us, but the dying does not go away because we want it to go away. The way of death only goes away when we choose to walk away from it.

We ask ourselves today, “Where have I found joy? When has it been in my life that I have been truly happy? This leads us to focus on the times that our union with Jesus was so intense, so strong, that all we wanted to do was just relax in His Love.

Lazarus, come out!

We ask God today for the courage to walk away from that which is killing us and to walk towards the voice that is saying, “Leave this place of the dead and live in My Light, in My Love, in My Joy.

From John 3:17

God sent His Son into the world not to condemn the world but so that through Him the world may be saved; so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.