

Lips to Speak, Ears to Hear

July 27, 2025

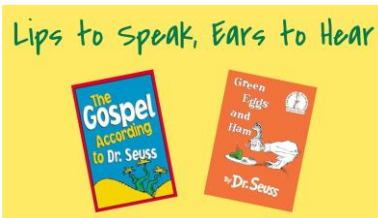
Ezekiel 37:1-11

¹ The Lord's power overcame me, and while I was in the Lord's spirit, he led me out and set me down in the middle of a certain valley. It was full of bones. ² He led me through them, all around, and I saw that there were a great many of them on the valley floor, and they were very dry. ³ He asked me, "Human one, can these bones live again?" I said, "Lord God, only you know." ⁴ He said to me, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, Dry bones, hear the Lord's word!" ⁵ The Lord God proclaims to these bones: I am about to put breath in you, and you will live again. ⁶ I will put sinews on you, place flesh on you, and cover you with skin. When I put breath in you, and you come to life, you will know that I am the Lord." ⁷ I prophesied just as I was commanded. There was a great noise as I was prophesying, then a great quaking, and the bones came together, bone by bone. ⁸ When I looked, suddenly there were sinews on them. The flesh appeared, and then they were covered over with skin. But there was still no breath in them. ⁹ He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, human one! Say to the breath, The Lord God proclaims: Come from the four winds, breath! Breathe into these dead bodies and let them live." ¹⁰ I prophesied just as he commanded me. When the breath entered them, they came to life and stood on their feet, an extraordinarily large company. ¹¹ He said to me, "Human one, these bones are the entire house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely finished.'

2nd Corinthians 5:14-20

¹⁴ The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: one died for the sake of all; therefore, all died. ¹⁵ He died for the sake of all so that those who are alive should live not for themselves but for the one who died for them and was raised.

¹⁶ So then, from this point on we won't recognize people by human standards. Even though we used to know Christ by human standards, that isn't how we know him now. ¹⁷ So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived! ¹⁸ All of these new things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and who gave us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹ In other words, God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people's sins against them. He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors who represent Christ. God is negotiating with you through us. We beg you as Christ's representatives, "Be reconciled to God!"



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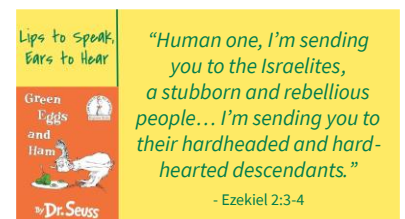
Asparagus and spinach, peas and zucchini, broccolini and asparagus, chives and avocado, green peppers and kiwi. What do these foods have in common? Yes, they are green. And these are but a few of the green foods that Prairey has shared with the students who come to Grace after school on Mondays. As you might have guessed, most of these foods were not initially or readily accepted by the students. Often the majority of the students did not want to try said green food, much like the character in the chair in the book *Green Eggs and Ham*. The reason for rejecting said food was the same as it was in this week's Dr. Seuss book – I've never tried it, but I know that I will not like it.

On Wednesday evening during "Summers with Seuss" I undertook the same activity with the students who came to that event that I did here this morning during the kids' message. And guess what, we had the same results. There is simply something that many folks dislike about green foods. Added to this is a common tendency that many of us share: we like the norm, the routine, the comfortable. We are averse to taking risks, to being uncomfortable.

In *Green Eggs and Ham*, Sam-I-Am acts a little bit like Prairey acted on those green food afternoons – trying to persuade the students to just try said green food. Unlike Sam-I-Am, though, she did not badger or hound or compel the students. Through sheer persistence, Sam-I-Am did get his friend to try the green eggs and ham. Now, it is hard to blame Sam’s friend for making him work at it. We all know people who initially resist something that they might like because it is different or because it is green. And we all know people who resist something that they ultimately need whether we like it or not. Truth be told, many of us are these people.

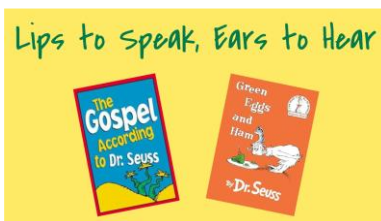
This resistance does not just apply to food. We can resist new ideas when those new ideas clash with what we have previously learned or understood. We can resist new events or new processes because that is not how we’ve always done things. We resist because often the “new” calls us to some serious self-introspection or to stepping outside of our comfort zones. The prophet Ezekiel called Israel out of their old and comfortable ways of living and into a new way of covenant living with God. This message was not well-received. About 800 years later, Jesus called the people of God into new ways of understanding how to love and be in the world. Paul’s words about the reconciliation that Jesus offered were not initially well-received in many circle. As we prepare to delve into the prophets’ words to Israel and to us today, let us pray...

In the opening chapters of Ezekiel, he is called by God to speak God’s words to the people of God. In chapter 2, God lays out the job description: *“Human one, I’m sending you to the Israelites, a stubborn and rebellious people... I’m sending you to their hardheaded and hard-hearted descendants.”* Ooh, sign me up, right?



To implant the words of God in him, Ezekiel is given a scroll to eat. As he eats the scroll it tastes “*as sweet as honey*.” To the people of Israel, however, the words of God that Ezekiel spoke to them tasted more like green eggs and ham. His words of lamentation and mourning and destruction and woe are not sweet as honey. But for the people of God, Ezekiel’s words, though unpopular and unappetizing, were necessary. Although Israel had long believed that they were the chosen people of God, that God was on their side, they had been defeated and hauled into exile. Living as refugees in a foreign land, many wanted to hear a word from God. They wanted words of comfort, words of assurance – something to make them feel better.

In times such as these, we often long for the “good old days,” for a time when things at least seemed better. This is what the Israelites longed for. But they longed for something that did not exist. Ezekiel is quick to point out their rebellion and hard-heartedness. The prophet reminds Israel of how unfaithful they were to God, of how they sought alliances with one world power after another, of how they turned to idols instead of to the one true God. Their devotion to God was replaced by devotion to self. These “good old days” are what led to the people of God being defeated and dispersed throughout the Babylonian empire. What made Ezekiel’s words hardest to hear was the fact that he was not content to keep the focus vague or general. No, he focused on individual responsibility. Yes, much is wrong with the overall society but to Ezekiel, each man, woman, and child was ultimately responsible.



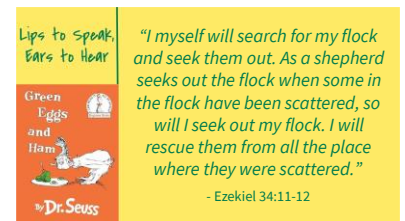
While this is not what each Israelite wanted to hear, again, it was what they needed to hear. We will find ourselves in the place of Ezekiel at times, needing to speak truth to others. It is easy to

blame others for what is wrong, but we too need to be reminded that we all had a role getting to the bad place we’re in and we all have a role to play in making things right again.

For the Israelites, things got worse in exile. Away from the temple, the Israelites further neglected their worship of God. They mourned their new reality and their “woe is me” attitude allowed the few remnants of their culture and the last vestiges of their faith to continue to deteriorate. Yet through Ezekiel, God remained present, beginning to whisper words of hope and promise to the people of God. As we turn to chapter 34, we read that God desires to remain present wherever and whenever God’s children roam. Out of this desire, God will seek out the children that have wandered, that find themselves in exile.

In verses 11 and 12 we read of this God: *“I myself will search for my flock and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out the flock when some in the flock have been scattered, so will I seek out my flock. I*

will rescue them from all the place where they were scattered.” Living as refugees in a foreign land, these words would speak hope and possibly begin to breathe life into their despair. To hear that God has not abandoned or forgotten you, to know that God is seeking you out, that is powerful. To know that God seeks and desires to rescue you is also to know that God’s grace still covers you. To be reminded that God was not just judge but is also redeemer and sustainer – it can bring hope into the greatest depths of darkness and despair.



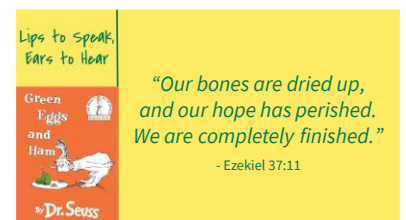
Sometimes though, the darkness and despair can feel overwhelming. So deep was Israel’s sin and so thorough was their defeat – it could be hard to believe in this hope and grace. We will encounter people who feel this way. We will cross paths with people who think themselves too far gone, too broken, too damaged, too sinful to ever be sought by God, to ever be rescued by God, to ever be redeemed by God’s grace and love, to ever be gathered into a place where they belong and find worth. We too will encounter people with ears that have difficulty hearing the words of restoration and forgiveness that we can speak.



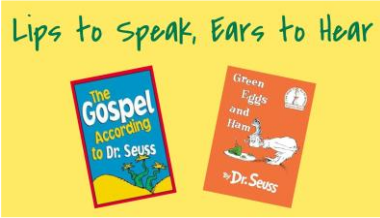
Turn with me to chapter 37 in Ezekiel. God needed to find another way to communicate the depth and breadth of God's love and grace, another way to help Israel understand that they were not too far gone, too broken, too damaged, too sinful to be redeemed and restored by God, the good shepherd. God brings Ezekiel and then Israel the vision of the dry bones. The valley that God takes Ezekiel to is full of bones – very dry bones. These bones are symbols of death, of destruction, of decay. God asks Ezekiel, and Israel, *“Human one, can these bones live?”* On one level, the answer is a flat-out “no.” No, that would be impossible. The bones look like they've been on the valley floor forever. They're dry as dry could be.

So, can these bones live? The answer is the same as the answer to this question: Can we ever be too far gone, too broken, too damaged, too sinful to be redeemed and restored by God? Ezekiel knows that anything is possible with God. As we read in the passage earlier, God says to the bones and to Israel, *“I am about to put breath in you, and you will live again.”* God first brings the bones together and next adds sinew then flesh then skin. But there is no life in these bodies. Through God's power, Ezekiel proclaims, *“Come from the four winds, breath! Breathe into these dead bodies and let them live.”* The breath comes and gives life through the renewing and restoring power of the Holy Spirit. Israel had thought, *“Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely finished.”*

There will be times when we think this way. These might not be the words we use, but this is the way we feel. We know or will encounter others who feel this way. Sometimes it is important for us to be reminded, to hear again that God can bring new life to any situation, to remember that But God says, “I'm not done with you yet.” And sometimes it is important for us to have lips to speak these truths to others.

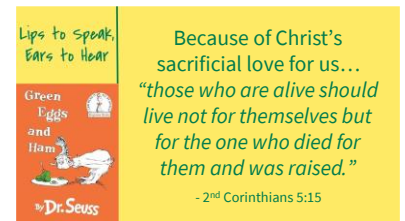


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As we turn to our second passage for today, to 2nd Corinthians 5, we turn our focus to Jesus Christ, the one who spoke wisdom and truth at times, the one who took the time to hear other's stories, the one who offers hope and new life, to the one who says to us all, again and again, "I'm not done with you yet. Your story is not finished."

Our Epistle passage for today comes in a section titled, "The Ministry of Reconciliation." Here Paul is writing to the church in Corinth, encouraging them to remember what Jesus did and to put his words and actions into practice, bringing healing and reconciliation to a broken world. As he often does, Paul begins at the root, at the foundation of our faith: Christ's love for us. Because of Christ's sacrificial love for us, Paul writes, *"those who are alive should live not for themselves but for the one who died for them and was raised."* If we choose to live not for self but for Christ, then it changes the way that we see others, the way we treat others.



This kind of change happens in *Green Eggs and Ham*. The character in the chair, we recall, did not like Sam-I-Am. He thought right away that Sam was there to pester him. To be fair, that is often what happened. And because of this, it affected how the character in the chair saw Sam-I-Am. It affected how he heard Sam's invitation to try a new food. In contrast to this, in the kitchen during our after-school program, the students see Prairey in a very positive way. Yes, she encourages them to try new foods but never pesters or badgers them. And, over time, Prairey has built up a great relationship with the students. This makes them more willing to try new things, to take a risk, to step outside of their comfort zones. In the same way, it matters how we see others, and it matters how they see us.

When we see others not with human standards – judging them or looking down on them, choosing to keep our distance because they are different than us or because they make us uncomfortable – then it will affect how we see them, how we speak to them, how we share our faith with them. Paul invites the Corinthians, and he invites us, to see others through the lens that Jesus would see them through. This lens sees all others as the beloved of God, as worthy of belonging to the family of God. Through this lens of love, we can envision all people being reconciled to God and to one another. Seeing through the lens of love, we see that no one is too far gone, too broken, too damaged, too sinful to be redeemed and restored by the Lord our God.

Understanding that the good shepherd longs to gather all the sheep to live under God's care and protection, we then are willing to take on the ministry of reconciliation. Because of God's love and grace that we have experienced personally, we come to believe and to live out this truth: *"So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!"* As Paul continues, he reminds the Corinthians, and us, that God gave them and us this ministry of reconciliation.



Through the power of Christ, with the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are part of God's plan to offer redemption and restoration to all people everywhere. In this role, we become, as Paul puts it, *"ambassadors who represent Christ."* With that power, presence, and guidance, God can and will use us to breathe new life into that which was dry, broken, dead, without hope. May we hear God's call on our lives so that God, the good shepherd, can lead us with grace and can guide us to see in love, creating in us and in others new hearts, bringing new life to us all. Alleluia and amen.

GPS - Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. How has God changed your theology or your understanding of God over the course of your faith journey? How have these changes led to growth in your faith?
- 2) *Pray*. Who do you know that thinks they are not too far gone, too broken, too damaged, too sinful to be redeemed or saved by God? How can you pray for them?
- 3) *Study*. Read 2nd Corinthians 5:21-6:2. How are lips to speak and ears to listen essential in the process of reconciliation? Right now, do you need to speak or to listen?