



Imagining the Future

An address for the Cosmic Mass ● 7th February 2010 ● Rev Heather

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. And God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

Genesis 1:1-8

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me round among them; and behold, there were very many upon the valley; and lo, they were very dry. And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, thou knowest." Again he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon 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."

So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And as I looked, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great host.

Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you home into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done it, says the LORD."

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Imagination: the language of spirit! What a wonderful faculty imagination is. It brings about new ideas, new attitudes, new inventions and leads to changes.

Leonardo da Vinci and, later, the Wright Brothers – amongst others – imagined people flying through the air. Today travelling from place to place by plane is an everyday happening.

Joern Utzon imagined a building with a structure that billowed and soared like sails, and the magnificent Sydney Opera House was built to capture that image in physical space.

Martin Luther King had a dream of a nation where people were equal, whatever the colour of their skin. He awakened that picture within thousands on thousands. Today an Afro-American holds the highest office in the United States.

Mario Schoenmaker, in his spiritual readings, saw the beyond the physical to the reality of the soul of the person before him. Images of their soul's journey through many lifetimes gave people a deeper insight into themselves and their purpose in this life.

Imagining is perhaps as close as humans get to creating something out of nothing the way God is said to, one writer said. David read from Genesis 1 the story of God imagining the world into being: Let there be... and it was so.

We all have this divine ability within us. It continues to develop as we practise it. And it opens up other possibilities in our lives.

New pictures or images arise in us - pictures of ourselves, of other people, of situations and of the world. We take hold of these pictures and they become the basis for our action. As God did, we say, *Let there be...* and it is so – though for us there seems to be more work and difficulties than for God!

When the Future is Bleak

It was a dark and wintry day in the soul of the prophet Ezekiel. He was in Babylon, a captive and exile along with other Israelite leaders. He was physically present in Babylon but his heart was in the land of Israel. In his mind's eye, he saw the holy city of Jerusalem. He saw Solomon's temple, the spiritual heart of the nation, in all its splendour. In his imagination, too, he foresaw the future of these things if his people did not change. What he saw made his heart very heavy. But before this particular day closed, it would be heavier still.

A messenger arrived in the city that day. He was probably starving and in tatters after a dangerous journey. He brought news that would shatter the community of exiles. Jerusalem had fallen to the invader. The temple was destroyed.

Ezekiel's soul wept over this destruction. The other exiles were in despair. Pictures of returning to their homeland had kept hope alive and their spirits looking forward. Now as they faced the future, it seemed that all that was meaningful lay behind them, in the past. The future could never match what they had had. The pictures that filled them were of what they had known and lost.

Now Ezekiel was a remarkable person. He had had many revelations and pictures from spirit. The momentous vision that gave purpose to his life in exile was a vision of the throne of God. From this glory God spoke to him and commissioned him as a prophet. *I send you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels ... and you shall say to them, Thus says the Lord God.*

Being a prophet is not a glamorous task. As a prophet, Ezekiel had been given painful images which he had to interpret and warnings which he had to deliver.

So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me.

He had done this faithfully. He had warned the people who still remained in the land of what would happen if they did not turn back to God. The purpose of these warnings was to give them an opportunity to change their ways. But they had rejected that opportunity. It was clear that they taken no notice whatsoever of his words. Now the land had been destroyed and the people made captives. It was a bleak and cheerless day indeed in Ezekiel's soul.

But that is not the end of the story. Ezekiel, as I said, was a remarkable man. He was open to the revelations of spirit. He could see not just with his physical eyes but also with the eyes of the heart. And in the depths of his despair, the spirit moved within him.

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me round among them; and behold, there were very many upon the valley, and lo, they were very dry.

He confronted a picture of deadness, dryness and loss of hope. In his vision, Ezekiel was led through the valley. Everywhere he walked there were bones. He walked through them, over them. They were dry, very dry. No spark of life anywhere. Utter desolation.

It was a picture of his nation. But it is also a picture that most of us recognize. Maybe we have been in this valley at some time in our lives and so have people we know and love. Times when there has been nothing but dryness within us. All the juices of life have dried up. The landscape of our soul is barren. A crisis, a trauma, a great disappointment or loss, a sense of separation from the divine, and everything around us becomes dry and brittle and lifeless. And we are dry and brittle, lifeless and hopeless.

Allowing the Possibility of an Alternative Picture

Can there be another possibility? An alternative picture? That's what Ezekiel was asked.

And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

Can these bones live? What kind of a question is that? Can this situation change? Can the seemingly impossible happen?

Ezekiel couldn't say yes. How could he? Everyone knows that dry bones do not live again. But neither did he did categorically say no. Simply entertaining the question was enough to let a faint light into the darkness. So he gave the only answer he could, *Lord, you know*. He gave up any reliance on what his rational mind told him and he acknowledged the greater wisdom of spirit.

When we allow the possibility that there can be another picture, even though it is not clear what that picture is, something opens up in us that has been shut off. It is like the first fragile tendrils and shoots that emerged after Black Saturday. It is like the first stirring of a faint breeze after a hot and airless day.

Acting on the New Possibility

When we let in the possibility of an alternative picture, we need to take hold of it, to let it grow in us, to let it become alive in us, to act in the light of it. So Ezekiel found.

Again he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay

sinews upon 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."

I think I would feel a right old fool doing what he was told to do. Even if Ezekiel did feel that way, he did as he was commanded. He spoke the words given to him. He made an affirmation to those dry bones. He asserted, *You shall live*. There would be a different future.

A picture of living beings began to grow in him. There was a noise, a rattling, and the bones began to come together. The toe bone connected to the foot bone, and so on.

And that was just the beginning.

And as I looked, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them.

Ezekiel's picture clarified and took shape. More and more substance entered into it until human forms were clearly evident. His assertion *You shall live* was coming into reality. It is one of the works of imagining the future to allow the image to develop until it reaches its fullness.

These human forms were like the picture of Adam in the second chapter of Genesis. It says that God formed Adam from the dust, but at first there was no breath in him. *Then God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.*

One thing was still missing from Ezekiel's picture, and that was the vitalizing principle. *There was no breath in them*. Our imaginations need breath, life, spirit, if we are to create something new for the future.

So Ezekiel had to take another step, and call the life into these human forms.

Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great host.

The New Imagination of the Future

The work of imagination was completed. To keep this vision of the future before him and to act in accordance with it, Ezekiel would draw on his faith, courage and will. We already realise, I think, that the year of imagination will call these things forth from us also.

In our personal lives and in our life as a community, we will be imagining the future. Here is an imagination about the Year of Imagination. We will open ourselves to our inner pictures. There will be pictures that come from our astral levels, that have to do with our personal desires. There will be other pictures that come from our etheric levels. We will become discerning as to which ones we will take hold of. We will learn to see with the heart what lies before us. We will be open to possibilities. We will take note of the messages of spirit that come to us in many ways.

From a valley of dry dusty bones to a living, breathing community of people - this image invigorated Ezekiel. It filled him with hope for the future.

And I will put my Spirit within you (that is, my people), and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done it, says the Lord."

Giving form and life to our inner pictures changes outcomes for us on a personal level. This is true also for us as a Christed community.

In the latest CentreCOMM, Mario talks about the purpose of being in The Centre.

We need to realise that we are here by appointment, that we are here together in order to start grappling with something which is deep within our souls. In this wrestling within ourselves, we come to a deeper appreciation of what is within us and what is within the souls of others.

We are here together to start grappling with something which is deep within our souls. That is one starting point for us as a community to go on to develop images of how the Centre's purposes can be best carried forward, to discover images that we share about our community's future and to act upon them.

For Ezekiel the process of imagining the future had several stages; it will for us too. Like him we will need to draw on our faith, courage and will to create this future.

So shall it be.

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