

“The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss: Green Eggs and Ham”

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Ezekiel 37:1-11

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. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” Then 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: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 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.”

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and 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, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, 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.” I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

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.’”

(Sam racing by holding a sign) Sam-I-Am... I-Am-Sam...

“That Sam-I-Am, that Sam-I-Am. I do not like that Sam-I-Am.”

“Do you like Green Eggs and Ham?”

“I do not like them, Sam-I-Am.”

“Would you like them here or there?”

“I would not like them here or there. I would not like them anywhere.”

Thus begins another classic Dr. Seuss children’s story, part of our summer Sunday School and Sermon series. Sam-I-Am’s mission through the pages of this text is to get the unknown second character to try an unfamiliar dish. I say unknown character, but they’re described in the first person, “I would not like them in a box. I would not like them with a fox.” “I” That means me. It means you or whoever’s reading.

Sam-I-Am is trying to persuade us, compel us, badger us, to try something we just know we’re going to dislike. Know, even before we try it. We resist. We make a fuss. We give all sorts of reasons why we don’t want to: It seems strange... We’ve never done it that way before... We always have potato salad... No one else is doing it this way... What it comes down to, of course, is that we don’t like extending ourselves. We don’t like moving beyond our comfort zone.

How often in life we resist something that ultimately we might like, or that we need whether we like it or not. We’re hesitant to try. We resist new ideas or perspectives. To accept them may require some serious self-inspection. Not everyone is ready for introspection.

The prophet Ezekiel reminds me of Sam-I-Am. He is given a plate of green eggs and ham in the form of a scroll, “filled with writing on both sides, songs of mourning, lamentation and doom” (2:10). The scroll represents the message Ezekiel is to deliver to the people of Israel. He has sampled the scroll and found the message to be “sweet as honey.” Yet he’s reminded that the people of Israel are not likely to agree with his opinion. Instead of heeding his words, they may tell him to keep his green eggs and ham.

Ezekiel’s is an unappetizing yet necessary message. It’s about 600 years before Christ. The nation of Israel is in ruins. It’s hard times for this people who believe that because they have been chosen by God, they are somehow invincible.

They want a message from God but they have a particular message in mind. None of this green eggs and ham for them. No, they want comfort food, something to make them feel better in their despair. What Ezekiel offers – words of warning and judgment – are not to their taste.

They want “the good old days.” But the good old days are never as good as we remember. Ezekiel observes that Israel had acted like an unfaithful spouse, compromising their faithfulness by chasing after one power or another. Time and again, the people confused or ignored their priorities. Covenants to neighboring nations were the ones they honored. Devotion to self took precedence over devotion to God. Jerusalem, he said, had become like the wood of a wild vine, fit only as fuel for a fire. Ezekiel’s message is hard to digest in part because he speaks in specifics rather than keeping things vague. He speaks of individual responsibility.

We can relate to this. We usually prefer to blame vague entities when problems arise – big business, politicians, Russia, immigrants, liberals, conservatives, you name it. Anything to prevent us from taking personal responsibility. We don’t want to acknowledge that how our spending creates injustice for people near and far, or how our habits of consumption – or leisure – adversely affect the world and its other inhabitants. It’s easier to resist the green eggs and ham than to face a message that we need to do things differently.

Yet like Sam-I-Am, Ezekiel will not be deterred. To those first listeners, and to us, he writes, “Therefore, I will judge each of you according to your ways... This is what the Lord God say. Turn, turn away from all your sins. Don’t let them be... obstacles for you” (18:30). Then as now, many of the problems people face are magnified by our failure as individuals to take responsibility.

How seriously do we as followers of Christ take the responsibility we have toward neighbor, church, nation? When the U.S. held people of Japanese descent in camps in Wyoming and other places, some recognized that we need to be beyond such things; others held to their xenophobia. When the Marathon County Board debated whether to recognize June as Pride month, many people were in favor of the action, but others argued loudly against the idea.

Do you avoid Martie or Mike when they’re approaching folks to help with Sunday School, Youth events, or VBS? When someone from the Lay Leadership Committee asks you to consider serving in leadership, do you come up with any excuse rather than say, “Yes”?

We have every reason to look to our own needs; God wants us to enjoy this life. Yet we must balance our desires with our responsibility to other people, to our church and to our

communities, especially if we want them to thrive. We have to act in ways that are for the long-term best interests of everyone and everything.

Each woman, each youth, each man is personally responsible. Do you live this way?

We might be reminded of the old story. Each of us have two wolves within us – one which compels us to grow beyond who we are now, to be compassionate and just, another which would harden us toward self-absorption and hatred of all that is different from us. Which one will be stronger? ... The one we feed.

Besides a message of gloom and doom, Ezekiel also reminds us that God is present wherever we roam and in every sphere of our lives. It's this belief in God's abiding presence that allows unpalatable green eggs and ham to seem sweet. For just as we cannot get away from, nor be forgotten by, God, this Source of all life will be with us in whatever scrapes we find ourselves. God not only judges us but redeems and sustains us.

Like a shepherd watching over their sheep, God cares for us. As the prophet conveys, "... I myself will search for my flock and seek them out... I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered... They will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them and they... are my people" (34:1-2a, 30a).

As for that field full of dry bones that [*name*] read about, the vision of these symbols of death and decay remind us that God can and does bring new life even when there seems to be no hope. We may sink into a pit of despair but through our acceptance of what God offers us, we too can rise through the action of God as Spirit. As we accept this, it becomes less surprising that God's grace and love can make green eggs and ham taste sweet as honey.

"I do so like green eggs and ham. Thank you! Thank you, Sam-I-Am!"

Will you proclaim Ezekiel's message? Will you live a life that demonstrates that you are, that we each are, accountable and that God's presence reaches into every corner of our lives?

Accept the challenge to heed God's way for you. Heed the challenge you'd rather ignore. Heed the word of inspiration when you so badly need it. Be bold as you accept your responsibility. Dare to hear God's call on your life so that God can lead you with caring. Dare greatly and God will bring the dry bones of your existence to life.

Amen.

Adapted from: James W Kemp, *The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss*, Judson Press, Valley Forge, 51-9.