

Allen Pruitt

What I loved about the preachers at my grandma's church
was that they were always hoping.

They never knew;
they only hoped.

They hoped they was saved;
they hoped they were a child of God,
they hoped they "hadn't said anything
that might be cause
for us to not be neighbors no more."
They hoped.

They weren't sure of much,
but they leaned their hope
on the Almighty love of God.

"The hand of the Lord came upon me...
and set me down in the middle of a valley;
it was full of bones.

He said to me,
"Mortal, can these bones live?"
I answered,
"O Lord God, you know."
How am I supposed to know?

What does a mortal know?

How can we know?

What can we *know*?

But God knows;

God knows that even dry bones can live.

Is that the kind of thing that *you* can know?

That you can let yourself believe?

That dry bones'll live,
that death isn't the end?

That God works all kinds of wonders in this world?

It's hard to believe.

In the middle of the night
and at the end of your rope;

it's hard to believe

that life can come out of a place like that.

But God knows;

God knows that life can come out of nothing,
...even your kind of nothing.

We've all got it.

The kind of nothing that belongs only to us,
the kind of empty that only you feel.

I don't like to dwell on it all too much,
don't like to sit still with it for very long.

I don't know what it feels like for you,
but for me,
it's not a hurting,
or even a longing.
It's not an ache that says,
"maybe there's something more."
No,
it's that fear that there isn't,
that more doesn't happen,
the fear that even what I see in front of my eyes
and feel in my heart,
is really just pretend.

Mortal,
can these bones live?
Y'all,
can life come out
of what we are afraid
is just pretend?

God only knows.

When my grandmother died at the end of November,
I was lost.

Not because her death was tragic:
she lived a long life with a lot of love.
We are mortal;
God alone is endless.
For as long as I can remember,
my grandma used to tell me,
“Grandson, we’re all born to die.”

But I was lost;
still am really.

Not because her death was tragic,
but because she was how I oriented so much of my life.

Whenever I was afraid I was lost,
I would just look around,
and be sure I wasn’t too far away from her.

And if I could see her,
then wherever I was
and whatever I was doing,
I knew that I wasn’t too far gone.

What happens when all that goes away?
What happens when we are afraid
that what we see in front of us
and feel in our heart,
is really just pretend?

God only knows.

I cannot begin to say how grateful I am
for all the love and support I received
in the wake of her death.

One of the best notes I got
was from a friend who said to me,

Thanks for letting me know.

*It is sad news
and you and your family are in my thoughts and prayers.*

*Your relationship with her
will always be what grounds you in the future
as it has been during her lifetime.
Just this morning, I woke up thinking about my parents
and an event from childhood
that I don't recall ever having thought about before.
And it helped me feel close to them
(though one has been gone 2 decades
and the other almost as long)
and (helped me to) understand something about myself and my brother
just a bit better.*

*So I know that your grandmother will always be part of your life
- even decades from now.*

Death is a fearful thing.
God brought the prophet Ezekiel
down into the face of it.
Down into a valley full of dry bones.
Bones with no life,
bones dead uncountable years.

We are powerless in the face of death.
“Mortal, can these bones live?”
“Oh Lord God,
you know;
I sure don’t!”

God is the only one who can give life.
God gave us all the life we have
and all the life we will ever have.
We didn’t do it ourselves.

It doesn’t matter our power
or money
or privilege
or station.

We were all born to die.

I promise;
this isn't a Good Friday sermon.
There's Easter around here somewhere,
Resurrection,
lurking off in a lost corner.

And it might just be
that the good news is this:
we were all born to die.

Takes the pressure off
when we inevitably do,
die that is.

We are mortal,
God alone is endless.
That goes for the grave,
and that goes for all our other kinds of dying too.

It's bound to happen.

"Mortal, can these bones live?
Oh Lord God,
you know."

And the Lord said to Ezekiel,
"prophecy to these bones."
The Lord said to Ezekiel,
speak the words of God to these bones
that they might have life.

Near the end of our Episcopal funeral service,
I am privileged to say these words,
 “All of us go down to the dust;
 yet even at the grave
 we make our song:
 Alleluia,
 alleluia,
 alleluia.”

Even in the valley full of dry bones,
we prophesy,
we tell the truth,
we speak the words of God,
 the words that give life to the dead.

What kind of a song is that?
What kind of a people
 can sing alleluia,
 standing over a grave?
What kind of a people
 can speak the words of Love,
 into the face of death?

What kind of life
do **they** have?