

Ezekiel is probably remembered for the 'dry bones' passage and the 'rivers of Babylon'. Here he is speaking to the Israelites in exile – 'God says he acts for the sake of his Holy Name' which Israel has profaned.' But God adds 'A new heart I will give you and a new Spirit'.

This prophet, a man of God, is trying to help the people to learn to 'sing the Lord's song in a strange land'.

They are facing huge challenges to their faith from idol worship in an alien land.

Ezekiel's name means 'God is strong'. And his faith helps him try to ignite a sense of identity in the 'exile crisis.'

He wants them to praise the Lord, and in ch 33 we read how he tells of God's Glory, hope and salvation for the Israelites.

They will be saved from their conquerors but also they need to know they will be saved for something more. Another prophet, Jeremiah tells that God says 'he has plans for you'. It was important that they looked ahead and kept their faith. Could they respond to Ezekiel's message? Could they respond with a new, strong faith?

For us, today as Christians – how do we deal with life's ups and downs? Can our faith respond to whatever the future holds?

Last week we heard from Peter how negative comments can hurt and affect our view of ourselves.

'Oh you are stone deaf, you cannot sing! 'This goes through life with us.

Or like my younger sister told she would not pass the 11 plus as she was not clever enough.

Some people are motivated by such comments to fight back and succeed whilst others just get downhearted and give up.

Perhaps some of you have the 'winter blues'. Already well intentioned resolutions have been forgotten or we have failed. . What is the point of new year resolutions? These need to be positive ones for change or growth not negative 'give up...'. .

You may have heard of a resolution suggested by the health forums to have a 'Dry January' .... No alcohol for a month. The best resolution I heard was from a young man last year who vowed to do a good turn, something for someone each week of 2015. This year he spoke about how this had changed his life. He had wanted to be the 'best he could be, the best of himself'. As Christians can we do this and be the best of ourselves as God plans for us?

Life is not always about success and being 'on the top of the world'. How we cope with failure, disaster or trauma is important. We can go into a deep depression, opt out and retreat into ourselves.

But what is success in God's eyes? I suspect he would like us to try to follow his way, his word and keep talking and listening to him. Then we can find the strength and hope for our today and our future.

Hope is in our faith and the words and actions of Jesus.

The Gospels tell us of Jesus' compassion and healing.

10 lepers were healed and when one came back to thank Jesus , Jesus said ‘your faith has made you whole’

The Samaritan woman at the well listened to Jesus’ words and ran to her village saying she had met the Messiah. The village responded by asking Jesus to stay amongst them for 2 days. Her faith responded and surely she was a true evangelist.

James wrote ‘As the body without spirit is dead , so faith without actions is dead’.  
So for us, we cannot change the past but God can give us a new heart and a new spirit for today and the future.

Michele Guinness is a well known Christian speaker. Born into a Jewish family she converted to Christianity and later married a vicar. I heard her speak at the Friars when she told us the Jewish way is to find 5 blessings in each day and to pray thanks to God.

This works on our attitude of mind so we can learn to be thankful and look for daily blessings even when life is not so rosy.

Faith responds in Psalm 9

I will praise you Lord with all my heart

I will tell of the wonderful things you have done

I will sing with joy because of you

I will sing praise to you Almighty God.