

May 24, 2015
Ezekiel 37:1-14

Pentecost B
Dead Bones That Live

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Risen and Ascended Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and from the Promised Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. Today is a big day in the church year. Today is a day to celebrate, it's a day to feast. Today many call the Birthday of the Church. Today is the day that the promise was fulfilled, the promise that the Holy Spirit would come upon His Church. Today is the day where we heard of the tongues of fire resting on the heads of the apostles and the wind blowing and speaking in other languages. Today is Pentecost, fifty days after the Resurrection of our Lord. Today we heard of the Holy Spirit giving power to the people to go out and share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Today is also the day that we hear from Ezekiel. It's a text that doesn't quite bring celebration to our ears. We'd rather picture the pomp and circumstance of the reading from Acts, rather than envisioning the valley that is full of dry bones.

Nevertheless, close your eyes for a moment and journey back to the Valley of Dry Bones, the valley that the Lord God brought Ezekiel. Thousands upon thousands of bones, bones as far as the eye can see. So many bones that you cannot even imagine them. Skulls, leg bones, arm bones, ribs, pelvic bones, back bones, and the piles of bones are insurmountable. Open your eyes again.

Those bones used to be living people. In our text From Ezekiel, we learn that these bones are the whole house of Israel. These are the people that are living in exile, those who have no hope and are cut off from their land. There's a promise that God will bring them back, He will bring them up out of their graves. As much as this is a vision and promise of the people living in exile, it's also a vision of you and me. It's a vision of the church today, the house of Israel of today.

You and I make up part of the Church today. You and I make up part of the House of Israel today. For by faith we are children of Abraham. You and I know what it is to live in a dry, hot valley. A valley that can be considered the valley of the shadow of death. You and I live in a sin-filled world that is broken beyond belief.

Perhaps when you closed your eyes and journeyed with Ezekiel to the Valley of Dry Bones you saw more than just dry bones, perhaps you saw the bones of your own family. No blood, no flesh, no skin, no breath, just bones. Perhaps you saw the bones of people you love and care for, bones that once were alive, but now are not.

Verse of our text resonates with you, "And he said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' And I answered, 'O Lord God, you know.'" Absolutely God knows. You and I know that for bones to live life brought back into them. Not just flesh, tendons, sinews, skin...they need the breath of God breathed into them. Remember when God created man in the Garden, in order for the man to live, God needed to breathe the breath of life into him. God did, and man lived.

As you gaze off into this valley of dry bones, to your left you see the bones of feet of someone that once marched in line, marched proudly with his fellow comrades. He stood tall and proud on his feet wearing the uniform of this great nation. Now those bones do not march, nor do they walk or run. They have been bleached out by the sun of pain, immobilized by grief of lost friends, lost limbs, lost dignity. They have been dried out scorching heat of horrific images that plague them day after day. Bones that we often forget even on such a weekend as this. "Tell me, son of man, can these bones live?"

As you continue to gaze off into this valley of dry bones, to your right you see the bones of hands. These hands once were used for good. They played with toy trucks and baby dolls. They dug in the dirt with mom and dad. As these hands grew they found trouble wherever they turned. They grabbed onto things that shouldn't be touched. They used their hands to hurt. These hands used to be innocent, now they aren't. Now these hands to ease the pain grab onto bottles, push needles into their skin. Now these hands have no more control and they do even more unspeakable things that mar and scar them and others. In this valley of addiction, crime, and violence their bones bake under the heat of a relentless sun. "Tell me, son of man, can these bones live?"

Right straight in front of you, you see the skulls, skulls of those who have been beaten by loved ones, others who have been used and abused. Still others who suffer a silent terror and they crouch down low into the valley of the shadow of death, into the valley of despair. Still other skulls, look to be swollen, swollen with pride, and others are crushed, crushed by beating their heads against the wall in frustration seeking a better place in life, that seems to just be a dead-end. "Tell me, son of man, can these bones live?"

All around you are bones. Bones of people that have no life. Bones that need help. Bones that are dried up and lost without hope or a future. In this valley of dry bones, include the bones of every man, woman, and child that have lived. Today in this valley, that you envision are your bones. Bones that are drying up because of the pains, fears, terrors, and sins that run rampant in your life, and you wonder, can these bones live again.

It can be bigger than that. Perhaps you see the bones of the church, the bones of a church that once was strong, vibrant, and full of life. The bones of a church that once didn't have to fight just to keep the doors open. The bones of a church that once didn't have to compete with outside society to keep the young people in the doors. The bones of a church that used to have a fire for outreach, but now it seems tired, worn out, and dried up. Tell me, son of man, can these bones live?"

The only answer that can be given is this, "O Lord God, you know." You, O Lord, are the only one that knows if these bones can live. You are the only way these bones can live. Ezekiel knew that as he was in this valley, and the Lord God told Ezekiel to prophesy over the bones and say, '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."

Ezekiel prophesied and he saw, go ahead and close your eyes and imagine this scene: "And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked and behold, 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, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army."

What a scene that is. God is putting the sinews of salvation onto you. He is going to grant to you the flesh of forgiveness, and he is going to graft onto you the skin of his most perfect love.

He is also going to breathe into His lungs and fill them with the breath of life and exhale the Spirit into your lungs, just as He did to Adam in the Garden of Eden.

He even tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the people and say: "Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am 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 into your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord."

The Lord God is telling you through Ezekiel that you will live. You will live in His grace. He will raise you up. He will pour out to you the Holy Spirit, just as He did on that first Pentecost. He gave you the Holy Spirit at your Baptism when you were named a child of God. You will live because of the bones of Jesus.

As you were gazing into the valley of dry bones to your left you saw the feet bones, on the very top you saw the bones of the feet of a man who didn't march, He walked a lonely road for you, he walked a road that you could never complete. His feet walked the straight path and never wandered off the path nor did he stomp and trample others where we would participate in the stampedes in life. His feet are the most beautiful feet, because He walked the lonely road for you. Those feet were pierced by a spike for you. Those feet then crushed the head of the old evil foe.

You also saw to your right a pile of hand bones. On the very top you now see the hands of the Son of God who used His hands for good. Healing lepers, the blind, the lame. Hands that refused to pick up a stone to cast the woman caught in adultery. These are the hands that would help others, hands that even brought a little girl back to life. These are the hands that were stretched out and nailed to the cross. These hands also were shown to Thomas to bring him out of disbelief. These hands are healing hands. These hands will one day reach into your grave and bring you up to resurrected life.

Straight in front of you, you saw skulls, skulls of broken people. On top of that pile, you see the head of the church. The head of the church who died on Golgotha...the place of the skull. This head bore a crown for you, not a crown with gold and jewels, but a crown of thorns. This head was beaten by soldiers and even spit upon so that you can feel and experience and know the Father's peace.

The answer to the question of "Can these bones live?" is a resounding YES. It's a yes, because You are already living in Christ.

You see, we all have skeletons in our closet, skeletons of past sins, past troubles, current sins, and current troubles. Those are wiped out. Christ has taken them from you. Christ forgives you and heals you.

Christ brings life to Dry Bones through His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection and through the breath of life breathed into those bones through the Holy Spirit.

Dear family of God, dear living bones. You live, because Christ lives in you. You live, because Christ is alive in you. You live because you have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. As members of the church of God and as an individual congregation, know that through the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, you can thrive, you can do the work of ministry in this place. Although you may be small, you can still do great things for the Kingdom of God in this place.

You may grieve that that past is gone, but still remember the past, and live for the future. God has given you the gift so that you can live into the future. He's given the church, the Holy Spirit, the very breath of God to live. My fellow redeemed, you can live fully for the kingdom of God. When you feel out of breath, continue to be refreshed with His Word spoken and preached you. Be refreshed as you remember your Baptisms. Know that the Lord God grants you the flesh of forgiveness in the Holy Absolution. Receive the Lord's Supper as often as possible. It gives to forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. There is no better way than to start your week with these gifts. Dear fellow members in God's Kingdom. You are alive. You are not dried up. You are living, because you have been given waters of Christ's saving blood. You may say your hope is lost, but it's not. Christ Himself is your hope. Christ will never cut you off from anything, Nothing will separate you from His love as we hear in Romans 8.

My dear family of God, beloved members of St. Paul and Trinity, on this Pentecost Sunday, this Memorial Day weekend, know that the Lord grants life through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers you to go forth in His love and in His Service. What a blessed gift the Holy Spirit was on that first Pentecost when nearly 3000 people were baptized and many more continue to be added even unto this day.

May God grant to you joy, life, hope, and a renewed sense of future, because the Holy Spirit lives in you and you are the Father's Child.

In the name of our Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.

- Ideas and thoughts are taken from a blog post by Chad Bird.