

**Ezekiel 37:1-14 (The Day of Pentecost—Series B)**

**“Bones!”**

**Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT**

**May 23, 2021**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text for this morning is the Old Testament Reading recorded in Ezekiel 37:

<sup>1</sup> The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. <sup>3</sup> And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” <sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. <sup>5</sup> Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup> 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.” <sup>7</sup> So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.” <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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 indeed cut off.’ <sup>12</sup> 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 into the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup> And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup> 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 am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”

Bones. Everywhere. Bones! Human bones all over the surface of the valley. A sea of scattered, disjointed bones! Very dry. Bones! Lacking any sign of life.

“Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off!” In Babylon, exiles from the land of Israel. Jerusalem destroyed. The temple in ruins. Commercial activity ended, for neither buyer nor seller is around. The Kingdom of Judah gone. The people taken captive to a foreign land. “Our bones are dried up,” cried out the house of Israel. Despair, downheartedness, listlessness. Death. A sea of scattered, disjointed bones! Very dry. Bones! Lacking any sign of life.

“As I live, declares the Lord Yahweh, . . . Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die” (Ezek. 18:3–4) The person who sins merits the just punishment of death. The person who lives contrary to the Word of God in desire, will, and action suffers what she or he has earned by that sin—death. Sin only brings death because sin separates a person from God. Without God, there is no life.

The nation of Israel was God’s covenant people. He chose them out of His pure grace to be His so that through the Promise made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all their descendants, the Messiah/Savior would come to redeem Israel and all nations from their sins, thereby rescuing them from death. But Israel would not be faithful to the Lord. The people and their leaders sought after false gods, idols. They worshiped Baal. They abandoned their covenant Lord and sought their own way. In Ezekiel 20, God said, “Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel and say to them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: . . . Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and go whoring after their detestable things? When you present your gifts and offer up your children in fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols to this day.” They failed to love Yahweh their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. They also neglected their neighbors and did not love one another. They lied and stole and cheated one another. They abused the poor. They failed to observe the Sabbath and the hearing of God’s Word.

Bones. Everywhere. Bones! A sea of scattered, disjointed bones! Very dry. Bones! Lacking any sign of life. “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off!” As individuals, the people of Israel were dead. As a nation, the people of Israel were also dead in their sins. Israel’s hope for survival as a nation and a people appeared dead and

buried. Prospects of national revival were as unlikely as a vast array of skeletons, dried and dismembered, coming to life again.

We ought to see ourselves in this visionary picture that Ezekiel saw. Like Israel we were dead in trespasses and sins. We, with our corrupted human nature, lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and mind without any thought toward the will and Word of God. We were by nature people under God's wrath, spiritually dead under the Law's condemnation. We have sinned. We did what was evil in the sight of God. We failed to always do the right thing, the moral thing. We were selfish, not caring about God or other people created by Him. "The soul who sins shall die." "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). That's what you and I, like Israel, had earned for ourselves. God's wrath and displeasure, temporal and eternal death.

You and I were like bones! A sea of scattered, disjointed bones! Very dry. Bones! Lacking any sign of life. And out of His grace, out of His fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in us, God chose to revive us, to bring us to life again.

"Thus says the Lord Yahweh 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 Yahweh." All of this would be done in order that Israel might come to understand the mystery and power of Yahweh. The ultimate concern for the people of Israel was not biological life, but spiritual, that they know the Lord. So God, according to His gracious promise, would recreate a nation dead in sin and trespass, a nation exiled because they had abandoned God and His covenant. God would not abandon His people in order that they

might know Him by faith as a God gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (Joel 2:13). The revelation of God's power to raise the spiritually (and physically) dead sends beams of light into the future beyond Israel's rescue from death in the Babylonian graveyard. A revived Israel is but the earthly clay that the Lord would use to call into being a Spirit-filled people of all nations, once dead in trespasses, but made alive in Christ Jesus.

With the language of new creation, God gives the Spirit. "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 am Yahweh; I have spoken, and I will do it!" The redeeming act of God would bring with it the revelation of His true self—I am Yahweh. I am God alone who saves you from sin and death. I impart new, spiritual life into you by the Holy Spirit. He is the "Lord and Giver of Life." And the life the Spirit gives is the life purchased and won for Israel and all people by Jesus Christ.

"On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:37–39 ESV). But on the Day of Pentecost in the year AD 30, Jesus had been glorified. He had been crucified as the Lamb of God, offering the once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of the people. He shed His holy, precious blood to atone for our sins, and not for ours only, but the for the sins of the world. Jesus died the death we should have suffered so that He might freely give to us His life. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, tells us, "I give

them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28 ESV).

God the Father and God the Son, our Risen and Ascended Lord Christ, poured out on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit upon the chosen disciples. He has given us the same Spirit through the Gospel Word and the blessed Sacraments of Christ. And so God has kept His promise to send the Spirit, to put His Spirit in us, to create in us new hearts, removing the hearts of stone and giving us hearts of flesh, causing us to live according to His commandments as we are the sanctified people of God (Ezk 36:26-27). God the Holy Spirit has made us holy by applying the blood of Christ to each of us personally in the Gospel, in Baptism, and in the Lord’s Supper for the forgiveness of sins and for eternal life.

In Psalm 118, which Luther calls his “own beloved psalm,” the holy writer rejoices in the saving work of the Lord. “The right hand of the LORD does valiantly, the right hand of the LORD exalts, the right hand of the LORD does valiantly!’ I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD. The LORD has disciplined me severely, but he has not given me over to death” (Psa. 118:15–18 ESV). I wonder if the people of Israel sang this psalm, remembering how God brought their dry bones to life, restoring them as His people to their land so that they might know Him alone as God and Lord and Savior especially when He sent His Son to bring all sinners from spiritual death to new life by grace through faith in Him.

As Christians, we know all the Old Testament promises are fulfilled in our Lord Jesus, so we can be confident that as we have entered our “promised land” by being part of the body of Christ, the Church, we also have the guarantee by His death and resurrection of entering the new heavens and earth after the resurrection. The Holy Spirit’s gift of spiritual

life to people once dead in sin results in the gift of bodily life to literally dead people in the resurrection at the Last Day. As we remember from the *Small Catechism*, “In this Christian Church [the Holy Spirit] daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.”

Bones. Everywhere. Bones! A sea of scattered, disjointed bones! Very dry. Bones! Lacking any sign of life. Not anymore! We are filled with the promised Holy Spirit. We have new life in Christ through faith given by the Spirit’s work through Word and Sacrament. We are alive in Christ, an exceedingly great army, looking forward to the day of resurrection and becoming the Church Triumphant in glory with our God and Savior—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.