

Sermon Pentecost 2018

May 20, 2018

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Old Testament Lesson from Ezekiel previously read and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

**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. 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.** As we hear Ezekiel prophesying, we get a clear picture of what's happening. Granted, this is just a vision, it's not really happening, per se—that is, Ezekiel isn't actually raising people from the dead at this moment, but we can clearly visualize what he's describing. There's the valley, there are the bones, and we imagine the bones clattering and rising, being joined together by sinews, by flesh, by skin, and being filled with breath, can't we? And we see in that life out of death. God brings life to these bones which are dead. And they aren't just dead, they're dead-dead.

I was reading a commentator on this as I was preparing that made the point that Ezekiel, having come in the time after Elijah and Elisha, would have been familiar with prophets raising the dead. Elijah raised the widow's son, and Elisha raised the son of the Shunammite woman. Then there was even the man who died and was buried, but when his body touched the bones of Elisha, he was raised. So resurrection would not have been unheard of for Ezekiel. But this is different. Those sons had just died, their bodies were likely still warm. The man who was buried, he wasn't still warm, but he wasn't just bones. No, he was still there, intact. But not those bones. Those bones are dead. They are dead-dead. They are so dead the flesh and blood on them no longer keeps them moist. They are exceedingly dry, they are so dead.

Christians, this is us in our sin. As Paul speaks of us being dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once walked, the death I spoke of last week from Ephesians two, as he talks about that, that's us. We are dead. We are dead-dead. We are dried up, and short of a miracle we aren't getting up.

But that's the point of this, isn't it? Sure, the Lord makes it clear to Ezekiel that this is a picture of Israel, that they think that they are defeated, and will not have victory, but what does God say? **“You shall know that I am the 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 in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord.”** And where did we see the graves opened? At the death of Jesus. In fact, look at Matthew 27 and you see a description of this. Jesus dies and the Temple curtain is torn. Then, there is an earthquake, and the rocks are split, and the graves open up, such that the bodies of saints are raised and they walk into the “holy city and appear to many.” It’s a weird scene. But this is the point. The point is, when the Lord speaks to Israel, Israel is you. Israel is all who believe in the Lord, in the Lord of the Old Testament, that is Jesus, the Lord of the New Testament. **“You shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves.”**

But as we’re celebrating the Feast of Pentecost this morning, what’s so pertinent about this passage for Pentecost? It’s how this raising happens in the lesson. What happens there? First the Lord sends Ezekiel, and what does He have Ezekiel do? He speaks, he prophesies over the bones. And as the Lord gives him the words to speak, as Ezekiel speaks the Lord’s word, what happens? Those words do exactly as they say. Those words perform exactly what Ezekiel speaks. These bones come together, the sinews come upon them, then the flesh, then the skin. And then what?

And then the Lord tells Ezekiel to speak the Spirit into them. Now, this is obviously the connection between this vision and Pentecost, after all, as we hear this story year in and year out about the tongues of fire coming down upon the disciples, what are we really remembering? The fulfillment of the promise that Jesus would give the Holy Spirit to the Church. Well, in this lesson we see just what this Spirit does. And you see this is so interesting because the word for Spirit in Hebrew—*Ruach*—and the word for Spirit in Greek—*Pneuma*, where we get pneumatic and pneumonia—both of those words have the flexibility to mean air, breath, or wind, or Spirit. In fact, this is what we see in Latin too, where we get the word Spirit. That word means air or breath or wind too, as in reSPIRation. And here in this lesson we see the Spirit, the breath, the air, the Spirit blown into these resurrected bodies to give them life.

Now as I say this, something that’s all the more interesting is this. Do you remember when God created Adam in the beginning how that happened? Genesis tells us that He formed Adam out of the ground and then He breathed life into him. So that’s creation there. The body is formed but needs the breath of life. And here we see it. Here is the body, but it needs the breath. However, what’s so interesting is that the verb for breathing is the same here and in Genesis, but the word for breath is not. In Genesis, the word for breath is not *Ruach*, it’s a different word. Here it is *Ruach*, the

Spirit, the Spirit that hovered over the waters at Creation in Genesis 1:1, the Spirit that dwelt in Joseph as he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, the Spirit who was upon Moses, and that the Lord poured upon the elders of Israel to share His burden, the Spirit who was poured out on the Church. And the Spirit who was poured into your heart as the called man of God prophesied over you: I baptize you in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This same Spirit who dwells in your heart as you hear the promise, "I forgive you all of your sins in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

You see that Spirit giving life to those bones, is the One who gives life to you because He is the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of the One crucified for your sin, bleeding and dying for them, so that as He was raised from the dead, you are raised to newness in Him. And this happens by the Word. As Jesus speaks and His breath leaves His mouth, that Spirit comes to you and creates new life in you, putting sinews on your dry bones, putting flesh on you, skin over that flesh, and breathing life in you. As the Lord says just before this in chapter 36: **"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God."**

As we celebrate Pentecost this morning, this is what we are celebrating, this Spirit given to us that we may hear of our new life in Jesus and by that hearing know that even our dead, sin ridden bones, our bones brittle in the dryness of mortality, that these bones are given new life.

And as I say that, this should be encouraging to us in our lives now, not only for ourselves, but for the world around us. But that I mean, I often speak of how discouraging the world around us is, in fact as I was at our pastors' conference this week we had some sessions where we all discussed some of those challenges of our world. We talked about how hard it is to teach our kids that they can have good rational reasons for believing the faith. We talked about the challenges that are coming as we deal with a culture that wants to vilify the Church as we speak to how sexuality and gender issues have a definite right and wrong. And it can be disheartening. But as we talked about that, the new President Elect of our district told us a story of a man he had known in his ministry.

This man's name was Mike. Mike had been raised at the church that our soon to be president serves. Mike had fallen away from the church because he felt that it had all been crammed down his throat. Eventually, Mike got cancer, if I remember correctly, and Mike's family told the pastor to see him. Which he did multiple times, if even to Mike's chagrin. That was years ago. Eventually Mike came to a place where death became immanent. What did he do? He called the pastor to "try work out things with the big guy" before he died. Mike looked like dry bones, but the Spirit brought life. The world looks like dry bones. We have the Lord who brings life to dry bones.

Now as I say that, I don't want us to be deluded that we'll see the fruit of things if we just try hard enough. There are times we'll pour our heart and soul into the world, into those who reject the faith, caring for them, loving them, confessing the great love of our God to them, and they will push it away.

But Christians, you were dry bones, and the Lord brought His life giving Spirit to you. You were dry bones, and the Lord Jesus came and bore your sin on His cross, rising to new life, to bring life to your dry bones. Certainly, we know that the Lord can bring life to those around us.

That then is what we celebrate on this Pentecost: the life that comes in the breath, the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God given in the Lord's Word—as a quick note to be sure we don't want to seek Him outside of that Word, outside of the words of Scripture, outside of the Word preached, the Word of absolution, the Word with the waters of baptism, the Word attached to the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. But as we seek Him in that Word, He is there, bringing life to us. He is there, here, bringing life to you. Bringing you the life that is not only life in Jesus now, but eternal life in His Kingdom, when your grave will be opened and you will know that He is the Lord, seeing Him face to face. Amen.