

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Pentecost Sunday, June 9, 2019

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

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Hymns: 224, 226:1-2, 231, 236, 233:7.

Lessons: Joel 2:28-32, Acts 2:1-21, John 14:25-27.

Sermon Text: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Today is called the Festival of the Holy Spirit because of the momentous New Testament event which happened on this day. This is a day when the Holy Spirit came in a special way to God's New Testament Christians 50 days after the Resurrection of Jesus as you heard about in our Epistle lesson. This was also a Jewish festival, 50 days after the Passover. This was a feast of joy and thanksgiving for the completion of what was called the summer harvest season. The able-bodied men were to be present at the temple, and a special sacrifice was offered.

The book of Ezekiel, with 48 chapters, is one of the longer prophecy books of the OT. Outlines of the book speak of three broad points: First, Threats of Judgement on God's Impenitent People, Second, Prophecies Against Hostile Nations, and Third, Promise of Restoration For God's Chastened People.

Today we look at just one tiny picture of God restoring life to sinful mankind in the third part of the book. We see a valley full of bones which are then brought back to life by God. What a picture! Wouldn't this make a good picture for a horror movie? But it is more than that. It is a

A PROPHECY OF GOD GIVING LIFE

1. **God, who created all things, gives life to dead, dry bones, a picture of all mankind.**
2. **God sends his Holy Spirit to give life.**

The prophet tells us *"The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry."* These were dry bones which once belonged to living creatures or even to living humans, but there is no life in them.

The Spirit of God – the Holy Ghost – asked the prophet, *"Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, 'O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.'*" Notice that the prophet is looking to God for an answer, just as every believer in Christ should look to God and his Word for answers to questions and things that are troubling us. We get into trouble when we let our own minds and emotions make decisions for us.

Of course, we know that God has a purpose in giving us a picture in the Scriptures. God tells the prophet: *"Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"*

The prophet did as the Lord had told him. We, too must do what the Lord tells us to do, even if all around us are saying something else.

And the bones came together and tendons and flesh came upon them, but they still looked like corpses. *"But there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these*

slain, that they may live.” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army.”

Breath, spirit, wind – these are all the same Hebrew word, the same Hebrew word which is often translated Spirit with a capital S, referring to the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit when the context makes that clear. Because God sent his Spirit, the dry, dead bones came to life! What a picture! This same picture is being applied to mankind when the Holy Spirit gives new life, and causes anyone to be born again when the Gospel of salvation comes into them and becomes a part of their lives.

Then God makes an immediate application of this picture: ***“Then [the Lord] said to me: ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’”***

By the time of Ezekiel, the people of God had almost lost all hope. Jerusalem had been captured by the Babylonians, and thousands, including Ezekiel had been taken prisoner. This had happened because they had turned against God individually and collectively as a nation and had broken his laws and smashed his covenant that he had made with them. They had abandoned God. They didn’t obey him when he gave them the land of Canaan for their very own. God had commanded them to destroy all the pagan peoples in the land of Canaan. They were also to destroy the things in this land which God told them to destroy and were not to keep them. God did this to separate for himself a people so that the Savior of all mankind could be born from their people. In this way God would fulfill his promises to Abraham that ***“all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*** Genesis 12:3 (NIV) God wanted a wall between his people and the unbelieving people of this world. But they had broken down the walls that God had commanded and intended between his chosen people and the wicked people around them.

Now, when they were lamenting that their “hope is gone” God promises that ***“I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel.”***

When the Word of God – through prophecy – came to the dead, dry bones, they came to life. That happens also today through the teaching and preaching of the Word.

Jesus promised before he ascended into heaven: ***“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*** Acts 1:8 (NIV) This illustration of the power of God happened on Pentecost, as you heard in our Epistle lesson. The Holy Ghost came with the sound of a mighty rushing wind, not the wind itself, and appeared as tongues like fire on the followers of Jesus. They also received the ability to speak in foreign languages so that many could hear the Gospel in their own languages.

God gave life to dead, dry bones in Ezekiel’s time through his Holy Spirit.

And what about us? It may be a long, long time since the Holy Ghost converted us – and put life into our dry, dead bones – maybe back when we were infants with lots of life likely ahead of us. For most of us this first happened at our baptism.

But how have we grown since then? We’ve heard the Word of God in our worship services, just as you are doing now. We’ve read the Bible in our homes. Oh, sure, we may have gone to Sunday School, 40 or so minutes a week. Oh, sure, we attended Catechism Instruction. But did you do that just to get confirmed and not have to spend two hours each week about 30 times a year with the pastor? It is so easy to just go through the motions. Yeah, And maybe we made some half-hearted attempts to get to Bible Class. But that means getting up an hour earlier on Sunday mornings!

At our baptism, we were born again, just like those dry dead bones in Ezekiel. We have been born of water and the Spirit. We’ve been called to be God’s people.

But are we dead, dry bones? Are we the ‘bump on the log’ that can’t and doesn’t do anything? By nature everyone is a bag of dry, dead bones with no ability to live any longer than God appointed – our three-score or 70 or so years on earth.

We were – along with all men, dead in trespasses and sins. But we confess in the third article “that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”

It is only through the work of the Spirit that life can come into us.

And instead of living in a physical land, we will live in the “land” of heaven.

But in our lives on earth aren't we often like dried up bones and skeletons that show no life that God has created in us, or, as we read in Revelation: ***“Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.”*** Revelation 3:2-3 (NIV) And again, to another group of Christians in Revelation: ***“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”*** Revelation 3:15-16 (NIV)

Have we shown our Christian lives to those around us? Do we reach out to others inviting them to come and hear about our faith?

When and how do you separate yourselves from the world? Isn't it much easier to go along with the world? We are surrounded with invitations to go along with the world. Don't we see it in invitations to join in activities at the same time church learning activities and worship are scheduled? And in all sorts of activities on Sunday?

The Devil wants nothing more than to draw us away from God's Word and will do all he can to do that. And ultimately, what are we preparing for? An eternity by following God's word, or a few years of activities and things and honor in this world?

We've spoken of physical things and activities that draw us away from God. But don't we also recognize it in our hearts? Paul writes: ***“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** Ephesians 5:3-20 (NIV)

This new life is marvelous – it is the Lord's doing! He tells us: ***“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”*** 1 Peter 2:9 (NIV)

For physical descendants of Abraham, the Lord did this very thing: ***“I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.”*** The Lord wants to guide and lead us spiritual descendants of Abraham every step of the way!

Lord make us living – each day – to you so that we may daily do your will, speak your words, and live to please you. Amen.