

## Sermon for May 18, 2024 – Pentecost

Ezekiel 37:1-14 (EHV)

### **Theme: Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!**

- 1) Though your hope has perished.
- 2) I will put my Spirit in you and you will live.

*The hand of the LORD was upon me. He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley, which was full of bones. <sup>2</sup>He had me pass through them and go all over among them. There were very many on the valley floor, and they were very dry. <sup>3</sup>He said to me, “Son of man, can these dry bones live?” I answered, “LORD God, you know.” <sup>4</sup>Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.’” <sup>5</sup>This is what the LORD God says to these bones. I am about to make breath enter you so that you will live. <sup>6</sup>I will attach tendons to you. I will put flesh back on you. I will cover you with skin and put breath in you, and you will live. Then you will know that I am the LORD. <sup>7</sup>So I prophesied as I had been commanded, and as I was prophesying there was a noise, a rattling, as the bones came together, one bone connecting to another. <sup>8</sup>As I watched, tendons were attached to them, then flesh grew over them, and skin covered them. But there was no breath in them. <sup>9</sup>Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the wind. Prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind that this is what the LORD God says. From the four winds, come, O wind, and breathe into these slain so that they may live.” <sup>10</sup>So I prophesied as he commanded me. Breath entered them, and they came back to life. They stood on their feet, a very, very large army. <sup>11</sup>Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They are saying, ‘Our bones are dried up. Our hope is lost. We have been completely cut off.’” <sup>12</sup>Therefore, prophesy and say to them that this is what the LORD God says. My people, I am going to open your graves and raise you up from your graves and bring you back to the soil of Israel. <sup>13</sup>Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and raise you up from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup>I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live. I will settle you on your own land, and you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.”*

Day after day, Ezekiel warned God’s people that judgment was coming - exhorting them to repent and prepare. But the people just laughed him off as a kooky, doomsday prophet. Sure, things were not great: they were recently taken captive to Babylon. “But we are children of Abraham and, therefore, heirs of God’s promises!” they thought to themselves, “The temple in Jerusalem stands as a testimony that the LORD won’t let us be utterly defeated.” Therefore, the people ignored God’s warnings through Ezekiel, refusing to listen and repent.

Then news came that Jerusalem had fallen. Still worse, the temple was destroyed. I don’t think we can accurately imagine how devastating that news was to the Jewish exiles. The temple was God’s house: the place where the priests prayed for the people and offered sacrifices for the atonement of their sins. Because of how integral the temple was to God’s promised grace to the Jews, its destruction meant they had fallen out of His favour. Would they, like many of the nations that existed in Canaan before them, be lost forever?

Yes, the Jews had every reason to despair, except for the fact that God loved them despite their unfaithfulness. He wanted them to live. That is why the LORD gave Ezekiel a new message to proclaim shortly after the temple was destroyed: a message of hope and restoration. Let us meditate on the hope the LORD offered his people and consider how it applies to us, under the theme: **Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!** 1) Though your hope has perished, 2) I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live.

Part One: Though your hope has perished.

Our sermon text begins: *The hand of the LORD was upon me. He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley, which was full of bones. <sup>2</sup>He had me pass through them and go all over among them. There were very many on the valley floor, and they were very dry.*

Have you ever seen old bones baked by the sun in the desert – all bleached and brittle? Not even the slightest hint of life is in them. That illustrates Judah’s spiritual condition: a people once brimming with spiritual life and favour from the LORD had lost it all - spiritually dead in their sins.

I want to pause here for a moment to talk about the warning Judah’s situation holds for us. By God’s grace, we have been called to life: into fellowship with the LORD through faith in Jesus. And what a wonderfully bless fellowship it is! In Christ, God grants us the forgiveness of sins, His gracious mercy, and the gift of everlasting life.

But what happened to Judah could easily happen to us. Instead of taking pride in their Saviour, they took pride in themselves. Instead of separating themselves from the world, they became engrossed with it. Instead of pointing others to the LORD, they allowed foreign idols to steal their hearts from Him. Sadly; the question is not: can those same things happen to us, but to what degree are we also guilty of those same sins? Aren’t we all tempted to take pride in ourselves instead of the LORD? Don’t we all let sinful, worldly things entice us away from God’s Word to some degree or another? Yes, the devil and his allies are constantly trying to lure us away from the LORD - just like he did with the Jews in Ezekiel’s day. How can we prevent that from happening? By listening to the LORD - acknowledging and repenting of our sin; for as we will soon see in our text, the LORD is full of forgiving mercy and love.

Yes, the situation looked dire for the Jews. Therefore, the LORD asked Ezekiel: “*Son of man, can these dry bones live?*” By human standards, it seemed impossible; but Ezekiel trusted that all things are possible for God. Therefore, Ezekiel answered, “*LORD God, you know.*”

<sup>4</sup>*Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.’”* <sup>5</sup>*This is what the LORD God says to these bones. I am about to make breath enter you so that you will live. <sup>6</sup>I will attach tendons to you. I will put flesh back on you. I will cover you with skin and put breath in you, and you will live. Then you will know that I am the LORD.*

Isn't it amazing? God could have spoken directly to the bones, but he chose to use a human as the conduit of his almighty Word. God's command to Ezekiel seemed foolish by human standards: command bones to live. And yet, even though Ezekiel spoke the words, the power to accomplish them would come from God himself.

When I look outside my bedroom window, I see a valley of dry bones. The Ottawa Valley is filled with spiritually dead people who are separated from Christ. When I consider how hostile and utterly opposed our society is to God's Word, I wonder: can these dry bones live? What can we say or do to get people to recognize their need for a Saviour and repent? The truth is that we can't. But God can. Even more amazing, The LORD chooses you and me to be conduits of his grace. He calls us to simply speak His truth in love – asking us to trust in His Spirit's power behind the Word He commands us to speak.

*<sup>7</sup>So I prophesied as I had been commanded, and as I was prophesying there was a noise, a rattling, as the bones came together, one bone connecting to another. <sup>8</sup>As I watched, tendons were attached to them, then flesh grew over them, and skin covered them. But there was no breath in them. <sup>9</sup>Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the wind. Prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind that this is what the LORD God says. From the four winds, come, O wind, and breathe into these slain so that they may live." <sup>10</sup>So I prophesied as he commanded me. Breath entered them, and they came back to life. They stood on their feet, a very, very large army.*

Why were the words Ezekiel spoke so effective? Because they were the LORD's words, spoken at His command. Just as the LORD formed Adam out of the dust and then breathed life into him, so the Holy Spirit restored his fallen people — breathing new, spiritual life in them. All of this emphasizes the life-giving power of God's Gospel. All of this reveals the grace God has for his wayward people in whose destruction he takes no pleasure.<sup>i</sup>

But what about the Gospel we share with our family, friends, and neighbours? Is it as effective as the words Ezekiel spoke? Yes, God's Word is always effective in awakening His chosen ones to faith and life. However, just as we don't immediately eat fruit from a tree we planted a day earlier, we probably will not immediately see fruits of the Gospel we plant in the hearts of others. Nevertheless, we can remain confident that God's word is always effective and will bear fruit in His good time, resulting in life for the believer and judgment for those who reject it.<sup>ii</sup>

But let's go back to our text and listen to the LORD's explanation of this vision:

Part Two: I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live.

*<sup>11</sup>Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They are saying, 'Our bones are dried up. Our hope is lost. We have been completely cut off.' <sup>12</sup>Therefore, prophesy and say to them that this is what the LORD God says. My people, I am going to open your graves and raise you up from your graves and bring you back to the soil of Israel. <sup>13</sup>Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and raise you up from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup>I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live. I will settle you in your own land, and you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD."*

Even though the Jews had lost all hope – believing that they would be separated from God forever - the LORD had other plans. As impossible as it seemed, He would lead them back to Canaan after 70 years of captivity and allow them to rebuild the temple. This restoration would be so miraculous, it would be as if they had been raised from the dead.

But that was not the only thing that was going to happen. The language the LORD uses points to a greater “resurrection” in the future – one in which he would bring spiritual life to all his chosen people, scattered throughout the world.

You see, we are the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy. How so? Because every person born in this world inherited a sinful nature from their parents that separates them from God. Like the dead bones in Ezekiel’s vision, we had no hope or power to save ourselves. But just as God took no pleasure in the death of his Old Testament people, so he takes no pleasure in ours. For that reason, the LORD sent His Son to save us. Jesus perfectly obeyed God’s law in our place and died in payment for our sins. He rose from the dead to show that God’s justice had been satisfied – that He reconciled us to God. And what did Jesus do after He ascended into heaven? He breathed out His Spirit on His Church at Pentecost - giving His disciples His life-giving Gospel and commissioning them to proclaim it throughout the world. And as they proclaimed the Gospel, the Spirit went out with them - awakening spiritual life in the hearts of many people throughout the world by bringing them to faith. Soon, a vast army arose – spiritually alive and ready to do God’s will.

And we belong to this holy army. We are the dry bones who have been made alive through the Gospel. As we look to Jesus in faith, we can have hope. Why? Because the LORD has mercifully forgiven all our sins in Christ. He has sent out His Spirit to breathe new life into us and has adopted us into his family through Holy Baptism.

And just as the Jews looked forward to the day that they would return to the land of Canaan, so we look forward to the day God will bring us to our forever home with Him in paradise. Yes, the LORD will do what he has spoken. Therefore, we have hope.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we live in uncertain times and recognize that we have not been as faithful to God as we ought. What should we do with this realization? Acknowledge and repent of all our sins and trust in God’s mercy to forgive us for Christ’s sake. Then, in the peace of His forgiveness, remember that the LORD is faithful to all His promises. He has already awakened you to spiritual life through His Gospel and has poured out His Spirit upon you through Holy Baptism. Because of Him, you live as a member of his army – ready to share his life-giving Word to the world. Share it, then, trusting that the Holy Spirit goes with you to keep you safe and bring life to others through the Gospel you confess. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Cf. Ezekiel 33:11

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. John 3:18 & John 12:44-50