**EZEKIEL 37:1-14**

**SOMETHING OLD, …SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL**

A valley full of old dry bones isn’t a very pleasant place to walk around in, especially when they’re all human bones. This Old Testament reading is an odd reading for the Day of Pentecost, and possibly very unpleasant if taken seriously, and we don’t trivialize it with children’s songs like “Dem Bones, Dem Bones, Dem Dry Bones”. What does a valley full of dry bones have to do with the coming of the Holy Spirit?

The key words in this text are Spirit and prophesy. Prophesy in our context means preaching. From the preaching of the Word of God by Ezekiel to these dry bones we see how the Holy Spirit works to bring about hope, restoration, and resurrection.

These bones represented real people — parents and grandparents, sons and daughters. People with real hopes and dreams, real triumphs and sorrows. Yet, for these people all of that was dried up, lost and cut off.

Now, this text has much wordplay that’s lost in the English translation. Many people find word games to be fun – crosswords, word searches, or wordle – and so let’s partake of one today. The word Spirit in Hebrew occurs ten times in these fourteen verses. However, it’s only translated as “Spirit” twice. The other times it’s translated as “breath” or “wind.” And so as we reflect on this text we’re going to search for breath and wind and turn them back into Spirit.

In verses four through six God the Father said, “‘Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the Word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause [Spirit] 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 [Spirit] in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD.’”

Later on God said to Ezekiel, “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’” (v 11). Yet, God doesn’t say to the house of Israel, ‘No, your bones aren’t dried up. No, your hope isn’t lost. No, you’re not cut off.’ God doesn’t dismiss our cries. But rather He says, ‘Yes, I see your pain. I will open your graves and give you hope in the resurrection.

We are the dry bones. We too can feel dry and made brittle by the sorrows of this life, the sins that distort us, and the years that wear us down. Like that disturbing sight of dry bones, we can see the horrors of our life, we can feel cut off from God, and we may only be able to whimper a plea to God for help.

According to Galatians 6:16 the church is the Israel of God. So, this prophecy is fulfilled as the Holy Spirit gathers the Church, God’s House of Israel, and opens our graves to live with Christ eternally in His Kingdom. What God tells Ezekiel He tells us. The Lord Jesus can turn our disturbing experiences into beauty. He hears our cries and He can bring about life where we see death. God listens to us about what is broken in our lives, He acknowledges our distress, and He helps.

The Lord’s help through Ezekiel is still the same for us today. “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD” (v 4). “God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, He gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when He wills, in those who hear the gospel” (AC V).

To hear God’s Word and live you need to come to church, you need to bring your children to church. If you don’t understand the sermon, read it again. Check out our website and download the sermon or pick up a paper copy in the narthex. Ask me if you don’t understand a certain part of the sermon. Why? Because the Holy Spirit comes to bring you life, to renew your lives through the preaching of God’s Holy Word.

We see this in our reading from the Book of Acts. Once the Spirit comes with the sound of the rushing wind, the flames of fire, and all those foreign languages, almost immediately Peter gets up and addresses the crowd. He preaches to the dry bones of those who have not yet come to faith in Jesus the simple message “that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).

The message of Christianity is that God sent His Son, Jesus, to this earth to live a perfect life to redeem us. This world is broken, lost in sin and hopeless. We become frail and brittle like those dry bones, and die, but Christ also died in our place, for our sins, and He rose again on the third day. Jesus came to redeem the world, and His life-giving death and resurrection is now joined to us in our baptisms.

The Holy Spirit comes to us in our baptisms and delivers life, forgiveness of sins, and restoration. We see this in our text. “And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on [those bones], and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no [Spirit] in them. Then He said to me, ‘Prophesy to the [Spirit]; prophesy, son of man, and say to the [Spirit], ‘Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four [Spirit], O [Spirit], and breathe on these slain, that they may **live**.’ So, I prophesied as He commanded me, and the [Spirit] came into them, and they **lived**”! (v’s 8-10). They only live once the Holy Spirit comes into them!

Likewise, the Lord promises “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. And 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.” (v’s 12-14).

We’re living in the fulfillment of this promise. The Lord God has placed His Spirit in us. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to dwell in the hearts of believers so that we may be restored from dry bones to living, breathing creatures, God’s church of the resurrection.

Maybe you have friends who don’t come to church, don’t want to be a part of the family of God, or maybe you only attend every once in a while. The devil tempts us to believe that being involved with the Church — participating in fellowship and worship each week, attending Bible studies, doing family devotions at home — the devil tempts us to believe that these things will turn us from living creatures into dry bones. We’ll miss out on all that the world has to offer us. A Saturday night party, a weekend camping trip, Sunday sporting events, all of these are more entertaining than what goes on here.

However, the Holy Spirit is in the restoration business. Ezekiel has to preach three times to the bones for them to become living again, and so it is for us; it takes a lifetime of hearing the preached Word of God and receiving the Sacraments to have the Spirit work in us, restore us and finally put that meat back on our bones. The end result will eventually be that the Spirit raises us from our tombs; we’ll be dry bones no longer.

God isn’t distant from us, and only coming to us now and then. He’s actually very close to us, listening to us, overhearing our cries, acknowledging our hurts to be true, and bringing us hope that’s beyond our imaginations and weekend entertainment.

As the Spirit keeps on presenting this preached message of Jesus dying and rising for us we’re restored little by little every day. We find that our lives are restored bit by bit. Those relationships that we thought we might lose are deepened as we grow closer to family — our biological family, and also our brothers and sisters in Christ. The hours we spend in prayer and study of God’s Word are given back to us as the Spirit redirects our priorities to the most meaningful things. The Spirit uses the preached Word of God to come to us and breathe new life into us – a life that’s worth living.

Today we celebrate the Holy Spirit, the great restorer, who restored those dry bones, who enlivened the disciples at Pentecost, and who is here with us now in God’s Church of the resurrection, making all things new. Amen!