

5th S. in Lent 3/29/20
Ezekiel 37:1-14 A

“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.”

Are you tired of social distancing? Has your patience worn out in being self-quarantined? This time of the Coronavirus pandemic is uncharted and uncertain. What do we do with our children with school being cancelled? Do I have enough food, and medicine, soap, toilet paper, and snacks for the dog? Maybe you are one of those who now find yourself without a paycheck, and you are wondering how are you going to pay rent, and purchase food and medicine? Maybe you or a loved one has been diagnosed with Covid-19, and you are left groping in darkness wondering how it will all turn out.

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, whether it's the coronavirus or another illness, snow, bullying, crime, troubles, fear, or death itself, earthly life has a way of taking it out of ya, doesn't it? Sometimes, it just knocks you right down and keeps you down.

To us who sometimes feel like dry bones, God has Good News: “I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live ... Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”

Ezekiel first prophesied these words during one of the worst times in Israel's history. The Babylonians had invaded Israel and carried its citizens into captivity. In our Old Testament lesson, enslaved in Babylon, the Israelites felt like dry, dead, lifeless bones. They had been the richest, most prosperous nation on earth. Now, they were slaves in a pagan land.

In their despair and discouragement, they cried, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off".

In the Garden, God promised Adam that in the day he would eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil "you shall surely die." And, die we did. Yes, physical death was still out there -- in the future. But in the day our parents took and ate, we lost the image of God in which we were created. We lost the ability to know God and do His will. We died spiritually. And, creation was cursed by sin and the death sin brings.

And yet, when course outbursts of the curse of sin happen, we are shocked, outraged, as though something strange were happening. Covid-19, cancer, blizzards, mass shootings, adultery, theft, vandalism, gossip, envy – these are the fruits of the death of sin. This is a difficult concept for us to wrap our minds around. Yet, we must ever remember what it means that we and the creation "died" when our parents ate of the forbidden fruit. Sin reigns in this present age. Sin is the norm. Surrounded by sin and in the weakness of our flesh, is it any wonder that we feel like dry, dead, lifeless bones?

God said to Ezekiel, "prophesy to the bones!" That is, keep preaching My Word to them and something marvelous is going to happen.

"I will cause breath to enter (them), and (they) shall live. And I will lay sinews upon (them), and will cause flesh to come upon (them), and cover (them) with skin, and put breath in (them), and (they) shall live, and (they) shall know that I am the LORD."

As Ezekiel was speaking, a miracle happened. There was a noise, the bones came together, tendons and flesh appeared on them, and breath entered them. The Holy Spirit made dry bones live!

What Good News God gives us in our lesson this Sunday. God is the One who gives life, both physical life and the new birth in Christ! Jesus, my Dear Friends in Christ, is "the author and finisher of your faith."

In our reading from Romans 8, St. Paul says, "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh."

Jesus was born of virgin mother and took on human flesh and bone to defeat our greatest enemy, death itself. And, He did it by taking all of our sins of thought, word, and deed upon Himself and carrying those sins to the cross, where He died as the punishment for our sin, so that we would be forgiven. He was buried. But, the third day, God the Father raised Him to life again. Now He says, "I am...the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore (Rev 1)."

At creation, God formed us from the dust of the earth and breathed into us the breath of life. After we fell into the death of sin, God breathes new life – the life of the Living, Victorious Savior Jesus Christ -- into us in the new birth of water and Word, our Baptism. We are not dry, lifeless bones with no hope, left to drown in our despair and discouragement. We are more than conquerors in Christ. We live today and forever in Jesus.

The raising of Lazarus reminds us that on the Last Day, Jesus will raise up all the dead. We believe and teach this in the meaning of the 3rd Article of the Apostles' Creed,

"On the Last Day He will raise up me and all the dead and will give eternal life to me and to all believers in Christ."

Every man, woman, youth, child, and infant who has ever lived and died on this earth since Adam and Eve will be raised up on the Last Day,

the day Jesus comes again. The same bodies that have died will be made alive. Those who confess Christ, in both body and soul, will begin the full enjoyment of being with Christ forever.

On the Last Day, Christ will raise me and all the dead. And, today, Christ raises us from the death of sin to new life that we may live in Him today. What raised Lazarus from the dead? The Word: "Lazarus, come out"! The Word of Christ. "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ," Paul teaches (Ro 10).

Even though God has raised us to new life in Christ, our old dead, dry bones continue to cause us grief and pain and continue to try to draw the life of Christ right out of us. We poor sinners are always fighting against God – doubting and distrusting God's will and ways; struggling under the weight of the cross; groping in the darkness of the valley of shadow of death. How often do we find ourselves, crying like the Israelites, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is lost!"

The Christian life is the life of repentance. Daily, we return to the waters of our baptism that weakness of our flesh may be frowned, and we may rise to live in Jesus.

Jesus says, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are life" (Jn. 6:63). Just as He called Lazarus from the death of the grave, He calls you from the death of your sin to live that new life you have in Him. Today, the Son of God calls you through His word, "Come out ..."

Jesus calls you to hear the words of absolution for your sins and have the Spirit breath Christ's eternal life into you.

Jesus calls you to feast upon Christ forgiving Body and Blood.
Jesus calls you ...

- to come out from your guilt, your fears, your worries;
- to come out of your despair and discouragement;
- to come out of your love of ease to be a soldier of the cross;
- to come out from concern only for self to love your neighbor as yourself;
- to come out to confess the eternal hope you have in Christ;
- to come out to let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Today, Jesus calls you to "Come out and live." Hearing that voice and living in Christ, we have life and hope and peace today, in the hour of death, and for all eternity. With faith and hope and trust in Jesus, we can say with St. Paul, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom" (2 Tm 4).