

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Stephen Southward

Pentecost
Saturday, May 22, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, May 23, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.

“And You Will Live!”

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

I am going to start this sermon with a hypothetical situation. The militant terrorist group called Isis has finally become a world power. Iran has managed to drop a couple of nuclear bombs on the United States. They have knocked out our power grids. Chaos is everywhere. Isis troops have taken out most of our cities. You and I were captured and taken by ship from Miami to Kuwait, where we were transported by bus to a work camp in Iraq. You have been told that the Villages lie in ruin, and that Our Redeemer Lutheran Church has been burned to the ground. Many of your family members were slaughtered by Isis since they were Christians. You are only alive because of some work skills you have. But who knows when Isis might decide to chop your head off. Everything looks hopeless. The Lord seems far away. Now the picture I have just presented to you is in a sense a true story. Just a different time and different location. The Babylonians from Iraq have overrun Jerusalem. They have laid that city to waste. The temple of Jerusalem has been burned to the ground, and you, a Jew, have been taken as a prisoner to Iraq or Baghdad.

A familiar Psalm, Psalm 137 comes to your mind, “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.” But there is a minister, whom the Lord provided, who helped lift your spirits from despair to new hope. That minister in Baghdad is Ezekiel. He gives us all an incredible message of hope. He

tells us, "You Will Live." Now imagine the most disturbing war images you have seen, pictures or paintings of Civil War battlefields with bodies laid out all over the place, mountains of Jews piled up in a ditch by Nazis, the many bodies of courageous soldiers all over the beaches of Normandy on D-Day. It must have been a somewhat familiar disturbing and startling sight for Ezekiel as he stood in the middle of a valley full of bones. The Lord was toying with Ezekiel a bit, setting him up to learn something important. He asked Ezekiel, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

It was an obvious question with an obvious answer. Of course they couldn't live! These people were dead. Yet Ezekiel the man of God responded in the positive, "O Lord God, you know." So the Lord told Ezekiel, "Prophecy over the 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 breath 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 breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord." Well, guess what happened. Ezekiel prophesied as commanded. All of a sudden there was a noise and the bones came together. Then there was flesh and skin on the bones. Before he knew it, there was a vast army standing in front of him. The Lord did the impossible! He gave life to a tremendously large army of dead people! Do you see what the Lord is trying to show us this morning?

This is not some scene from a movie, but a vision given to Ezekiel to illustrate how the Word of the Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit can breathe new life into people who are like dead bones scattered in the desert. That is the way we all were at one point in our lives. We were born into this world so dead and so dry. We were dead in our trespasses and sins. We were without God and without hope. Even though we have been brought to life through faith in Christ, our old dead, dry bones continue to cause us grief and pain and they continue to

try to draw the life of Christ right out of us. David said it, "All my bones are out of joint." (Ps 22:14) Hezekiah said it, "Like a lion he broke all my bones." (Is 38:13) Habakkuk said it, "Decay crept into my bones." (Hab 3:16) These men, mind you, weren't talking about arthritis, although they may have had that too. They were talking about sin and its effect on their vitality as children of God. My bones have ached, as I know yours have too. In Psalm 32, David says that much of the wasting away and the aching of his bones was from his failure to confess his sin before God. "My bones (he said) wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity." I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin." Yes, we thought we could make our own peace with God by paying off our debt of sin. Then the Holy Spirit convicted us and convinced us that there is no peace with God except through the peace Jesus made for us through his perfect sacrifice and his victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil. The Bible says, "No man can say Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:3) The Holy Spirit comforts us with this peace every day. Now that we are spiritually alive, we have a brain that is enlightened. We now can begin to understand the Bible better.

The Bible is starting to make sense. The Holy Spirit moves us to want to hate sin and live a more God pleasing life. As a result, We have a new attitude. The Bible says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2 Cor. 5: 17) We are now not self-centered, but God centered. We are blessed with spiritual gifts, special abilities given by the Holy Spirit to us for the upbuilding of Christ's church. We are given Christian virtues. The Bible says, "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Gal. 5:22) It seems impossible! But it is not, because the Lord has opened our spiritual graves and

brought us out of them. How is that possible? “I the Lord has spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.” This is the power of the Holy Spirit. The Lord declares, “You Will Live.” When Ezekiel served as prophet, things were not good for the Israelites. In fact, they were really, really bad. Israel was in exile. The Babylonians had swept through and destroyed the land and carried the people away. The capital city Jerusalem had been destroyed. Many of the Israelites had been slaughtered.

The rest were hundreds of miles away from home. They were among people they didn't know. Their country and capital and temple were gone. It could hardly get any worse. In verse 11 the Lord gives us an insight into their thoughts, “Our bones are dried up and our hope is lost. We are indeed cut off.” Despair was setting in. They were giving up hope. They felt cut off from the Lord and saw nothing but death and damnation in their future. So let me ask you. What is your level of hope like these days? How hopeful have you been? It has been said that a person can live 30 days without food, 3 days without water, and 3 minutes without air to breathe, but only 3 seconds without hope. When you start losing even a little bit of hope, life can suddenly start looking really dismal and gloomy. Maybe you have had some thoughts creep into your mind lately. When will this ever get better? Won't this ever end? How much can I put up with and endure? What is God doing here? Will this really be for my good? Has he forgotten about me? Is he going to help me? Am I all alone here? It doesn't take much for us to start despairing and losing hope ourselves. We might not be in Babylon in exile, but sometimes it feels like we are exiled to a life of loneliness and sadness and heartache and suffering. Like Israel of old, we quickly forget the power and might of our God. Weak and feeble hearts forget what God has promised and forget what God has done in the past.

Corrupt and contemptible hearts then will even become angry with God that he would “let this happen to me.” Sometimes when we feel cut off from

God, we take the extra step and cut ourselves off from God. This was the point of the valley of dry bones. Again in verse 11 and then in verse 12 it says, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, Our bones are dried up and our hope is lost. We are cut off. 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." Yes, it seemed impossible! How could this happen? How could they possibly escape from exile and return back home? They were as good as dead! But again, the same emphasis comes forward. The Sovereign Lord says, the Sovereign Lord says. The Lord has spoken. He will do it. By his power and might the Lord was promising them a future life that seemed impossible. They were going to return from exile and be God's people in the Promised Land!

And it happened. They eventually returned. Now as we stumble and tumble our way through this life, any and all hope might seem impossible. How could it happen? How could things possibly get better? But Ezekiel's same words ring clearly to us two and a half thousand years later, The Sovereign Lord says, The Lord has spoken, so he will do it. This is what he declares. So when the Bible says that though our sins are as scarlet and they shall be as white as snow (Is. 1:18), then our sins really are washed away. And When he says, "God is faithful, he will not allow you to be tested above what you can bear," (1 Cor. 10:13) He means it. And when Jesus promises that because he lives, we will live, then we really will live in heaven. And when Jesus promises that there will be no more suffering or pain or sadness or tears in heaven, then there will be only happiness and joy. The Lord has spoken. He will do it. This is what he declares. This is the power of God. This is the power of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Declares, "You Will Live."

Sometimes God works in such miraculous ways that we can only take a step back and fall before him in humble awe and worship. Thorough the miracle of Holy

Baptism God washed all our sins away through water and the Word and faith was put into our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit and we were made God's children and members of his family the church. And through the Lord's Supper we receive the miracle of Christ's body and blood in bread and wine. And in this sacred meal we receive the assurance of our forgiveness, the blessing of his love and the promise of our salvation. Yes, how incredible it must have been to stand in the valley of dry bones and watch bone after bone attach with tendons and skin covering them, breath entering in, and then a large army coming to life. How incredible it must have been on Pentecost to listen to Peter boldly proclaim Jesus and watch as over three thousand people were baptized and came to faith on one day.

How could a church spring up in its teachings in the Villages as it did? How could just 5 people be blessed on a land sale transaction that paid $\frac{3}{4}$ of this building? How can so many people learn about Jesus on a regular basis here? How can so many lives be touched in so few years? This is the power of God. The Power of the Holy Spirit. Then we finally take a step back and fall before the Lord in humble awe and worship one more time. How could God love me so much? How could he forgive so many sins? How could he make someone spiritually dead and doomed to hell and become his own dear child bound for heaven? It seems impossible! How could this happen? "Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord . I will put my Spirit in you and you will live. Forgiveness, new life, and heaven seem impossible. But they aren't! The Sovereign Lord has spoken. He has done it. Only by Jesus life, death, and resurrection, has he made eternal life a reality for us who believe in him. It is yours. It is mine through faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. This is what the Lord declares. And because all this is true "We Will Live!" I praise God that this is so for us all.

IN JESUS NAME. AMEN!