

## **Ezekiel 37:1-14**

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our text for this morning of Pentecost is from the book of Ezekiel, “Then he said to me, “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.’ 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.”

This text is one that has a very cinematic quality to it. Though we hear and receive this as words, it is easy to picture this happening. The camera pans over the valley, showing Ezekiel as a lone figure standing down in it. Ezekiel sees the valley of bones, and after he speaks, the bones come together and then are covered over with skin from the inside out. Then Ezekiel stands at the head of his new army of the undead, the greatest necromancer to ever live and goes forth to conquer the world! Well, maybe not that last part. In fact, absolutely not that last part.

In order to really understand this text, we need to know who Ezekiel was. He was one of the prophets of the exile. Remember, the kingdom of Israel was split into a northern kingdom of Israel and a southern kingdom of Judah. The Northern Kingdom was destroyed by the Assyrians and the Southern Kingdom was destroyed almost two hundred years

later by the Babylonians. Ezekiel was one of the people carried away into exile in Babylon. He was in the midst of a people who had blown it big time and were crushed because of their sin. The people of Judah had loved luxury and wealth more than caring for each other. They worshipped false gods and made sacrifices to gods other than the true God who brought them out of Egypt into the land promised to their fathers. They ignored and killed God's prophets who he sent to call his people back to faith.

And so for their wicked faithlessness, God used the Babylonians to carry out his judgement on the land of Judah. The Temple was robbed and then destroyed. People were brutally slaughtered. They were carried out of their land and brought into Babylon, far away from what they had ever known. They were people who were second class citizens in their own cities. They had been thoroughly beaten. Babylon was stronger than Judah and by extension, it seemed that the gods of Babylon

were greater than the God of Judah, who is our God too. They never even stopped to consider that it was they who had abandoned their God rather than him abandoning them.

The people of Judah had given up hope. They were sure that God had turned his back on them. They were as good as a bunch of dried up, broken skeletons moldering in the desert somewhere. Many of us at various times can, I think, feel as though we ourselves are inhabiting a valley of old, dried up bones. We may think that we have been abandoned and defeated. When we don't find a job in the field we wanted. When relationships with people that we really care about come to a catastrophic end. When we continually struggle with finances even though we've made changes. When we just don't feel safe in our lives. It can seem as though we ought to have a place there amongst those dried up, dusty, and defeated bones.

Other times, we may feel as though we are walking amongst the ruins and in a valley full of the bones of the dead. We see the evil in our world around us and our hearts sink. We see that yet once again this week a young person decided to take the lives of people who he went to school with. We hear stories about parents brutalizing their children and see nothing but those who are cut off from the Lord. We watch those who we love slide into addiction and their bones are added to the pile of those who have been defeated. The strain that mental illness causes in a family can lead to everyone feeling like they are both the bones and that they can only see bones as far as the eye can see. In short, despair appears to be our only response.

It is easy for us to slide into despair. To you, young confirmands, know that the day will come when you feel the cold weight of despair upon your heart. I don't say this because it is some inescapable trap or a mire without end. But rather I

say it because it is true. We all feel the touch of despair. It is the same despair felt by the people of Judah while they were in exile. It is the same despair that has been felt by many people before you and will be felt by people after you as well.

But our God did not leave the people of Judah as a heap of dead, dry bones. No, he gave Ezekiel this vision so that they would have hope. Hope that the day would come when they were restored to their land. Hope that they would no longer be captives in a foreign land. Hope that they had not been abandoned by their God. Hope that they would be made alive in the Spirit.

And so he did. The Lord restored the people back to their land. The bones of Israel were raised up again. Jerusalem was restored and the Temple was rebuilt. But it was never the same. Israel was not truly and fully restored until there arose one who was Israel reduced to one. A new set of bones were built cell by

cell in the womb of a virgin. A new body for Israel was established and the Son of God became man. Our Lord Jesus Christ was knit together not by the power of the Word from the mouth of a prophet, but by the creative power of the Word himself becoming flesh.

And the very Son of God, Jesus Christ himself would die. He was crucified for our sins, for our transgressions. For all of the evil things that we have done that should rightly make us subject to abandonment by God, Christ died. As he hung on the cross, he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Yes, Jesus suffered the abandonment that we deserve. He was cut off so that we would not be. His death on the cross paid the price for all of our sins. His blood became the sacrifice for our evil. He bled, suffered, and died so that we wouldn’t have to. Jesus appeared to be yet another skeleton to add to the pile.

It is this Christ who has redeemed us. He has declared us righteous and clean. Forgiveness of sins is given only and entirely through the faith that we have received through the work of the Holy Spirit. And on this day of Pentecost, we celebrate and rejoice that we have all been made alive through the Holy Spirit. We are not a pile of bones lost and abandoned in a valley in the desert somewhere. We are the people of Israel. We are the sons of Abraham through faith. We are those who have been knit together and made alive through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We have confirmation this day not only for the sake of these young people, but also for the benefit for all of us. As we see these confirmands come up and make their confirmation vows, remember the vow that you made to remain faithful to this truth, this doctrine, even to the point of death. This truth of the Gospel is life itself; and is not something that we should easily



or thoughtlessly walk away from. Thanks be to God that he has given us his Holy Spirit that we would believe this to be true and that we would turn to Christ for forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life.

That is the enduring gift of the Holy Spirit. It would be wonderful if at our confirmations the Holy Spirit would come and rest upon us as it did on the Apostles on Pentecost. But what we have is something far greater than a spectacular sign. We have faith. We have been given the very thing that God requires of us and judges us on. He has given us the Holy Spirit who gives us faith to believe. That doesn't change when we are confirmed because each of you already have the Spirit. We receive the Spirit when we are baptized. The Spirit works in us when we hear the Word. The Spirit works when we receive the Sacrament in faith so that we receive benefit and not judgement.

My hope is that all of us would remain faithful to this faith even to death. None of us should easily or thoughtlessly walk away from that which has given us life. The alternative is to return to a valley of dead, dry bones. But through the Spirit, we are his living people, the Church on the earth, the dwelling place of God. Amen.

Now, may the peace that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord to life everlasting.

Amen.