

#1778
Cf. #323 #478

Ezekiel 37:1-14¹
The Spirit gives life to dead dry bones.
The Feast of Pentecost
Supplementary Lectionary Series “B,”
Old Testament

Pastor A. J. Kunde
Grace WELS Durand MI
May 19, 2013
Rail Road Days Weekend

THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES LIFE
I. TO DEAD, DRY BONES
II. THROUGH PROPHECY

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

Today’s Scripture Lessons focused on the New Testament Festival of Pentecost. On that day, the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus’ disciples in a special way.

The disciples – not just the twelve, but all the believers in Jesus, gathered in Jerusalem – the disciples already had the Holy Spirit, for they were believers in Jesus. Without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, faith in Jesus is impossible; as St. Paul states: “No one can say [or confess, or believe that], ‘Jesus is LORD,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3b). They were already believers. But now, the Holy Spirit came upon these believers in a special way so that they could proclaim the Good News about Jesus in many different languages – languages which they had not previously studied. It was through this proclamation of the Good News about Jesus, or the Gospel, that the Holy Spirit worked to bring many more to faith in Jesus on that first New Testament Pentecost.

Pentecost was an Old Testament harvest festival. Fifty days – Pentecost means “fifty” – fifty days after Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost was celebrated. Old Testament Pentecost celebrated the harvest of grains, which God gave to his people. The New Testament Pentecost celebrated the harvest of souls – the harvest of souls through the Gospel.

You heard Peter’s Pentecost Sermon earlier in the Scripture Lessons (cf. Acts 2:1-41). You also heard of the harvest of souls on that day as Luke records, “about three thousand” came to faith in Jesus on that first New Testament Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:41b). Pentecost has continued as, throughout the world, the Gospel of Jesus is proclaimed, and more and more people are brought to faith in Jesus through that Gospel.

It is through the Gospel that Pentecost – the Harvest of Souls – continues. The Holy Spirit works through the proclamation of the Gospel to harvest these souls – bring them to faith

¹ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

in Jesus. The Sovereign LORD revealed this truth to his Old Testament Prophet Ezekiel. Our text is Ezekiel 37:1-14:

37:1 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. 3 He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "O Sovereign LORD [Lord LORD], you alone know."

4 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the Word of the LORD! 5 This is what the Sovereign LORD [Lord LORD] says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. 6 I will attach tendons [sinews] to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 I looked, and tendons [sinews] and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD [Lord LORD] says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'"

10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath [Spirit] entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

11 Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole House of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' 12 Therefore prophecy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD [Lord LORD] says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you to the Land of Israel. 13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14 I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.'"

Thus, we see that THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES LIFE. THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES LIFE ... I. TO DEAD, DRY BONES; II. THROUGH PROPHECY.

THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES LIFE
I. TO DEAD, DRY BONES

The Sovereign LORD gives a vision to Ezekiel.

37:1 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full

of bones. ² He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry (37:1&2).

Ezekiel saw a vision of a valley – a broad valley – upon which were spread out a vast array of dry, dead bones. The Hebrew states that these bones were very, very dry bones. There was absolutely no life in them at all. The Sovereign LORD also describes these bones as having been “slain” (37:9b). Then the Sovereign LORD asks Ezekiel a question.

The Sovereign LORD asks Ezekiel, “Can these bones live?” (37:3a). Ezekiel knows that humanly speaking there was no hope for these very, very, dry, lifeless, dead bones to live again. At the same time, Ezekiel also knew the Old Testament Scriptures that were available up to that time.

Ezekiel knew how the Sovereign LORD, through his Prophet Elijah, had raised the son of the widow at Zarephath (cf. 1 Kings 17:17-24). Ezekiel knew how the Sovereign LORD had, through his Prophet Elisha, raised from death the son of the Shunamite (cf. 2 Kings 4:8-37). So, Ezekiel very carefully replies to the question of the Sovereign LORD regarding the giving of life to these very, very dry and dead bones – Ezekiel replies, “O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.” Ezekiel knew, therefore, that with God, the Sovereign LORD, all things were possible (cf. Matthew 9:26; Mark 10:27).

Would these very, very dry lifeless bones live again? The Sovereign LORD explains that these very, very dry lifeless bones are really a metaphor or picture of Israel.

The Sovereign LORD tells Ezekiel, “Son of man, these bones are the whole House of Israel” (37:11a). These very, very dry dead bones represented “the whole House of Israel” – both those of the Northern Kingdom, which became known as Israel, as well as those of the Southern Kingdom, which became known as Judah. All of Israel was in exile in Babylon. The Armies of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar had defeated “the whole House of Israel”; destroyed both Samaria in the north and Jerusalem in the south; ransacked and leveled the Temple in Jerusalem; and, carried off “the whole House of Israel” into captivity. This was just and right, for “the whole House of Israel” had forsaken their Sovereign LORD by their sin, injustice, impenitence, idolatry, and immorality. Now, in exile, “the whole House of Israel” was saying, “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off” (37:11b). They were right. Humanly speaking, there was no hope for them.

APPROPRIATION

Humanly speaking, there is no hope either for you ... and you ... and you ... and me. You and I too are like those very, very dry and lifeless bones that the Sovereign LORD showed to Ezekiel. The Apostle Paul puts this truth in these words in his Epistle or Letter to the Ephesians,

2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3).

“Dead in ... transgressions and sins.” Later, St. Paul adds to this description, when he says, “remember that ... you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). Those are some of the same words that Israel in Exile was saying: “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off” (37:11b). That is also a description of you and me.

By nature, we are “dead in transgressions and sins.” Like very, very dry dead and lifeless bones, we can do nothing to change our dead condition. Dead things cannot make themselves alive. Dead people cannot make themselves live. You cannot choose or decide to live – live spiritually. But the question comes also concerning us, “Can these bones live?” (37:3b). The answer is no. On the basis of ourselves we cannot live spiritually.

Being “dead in transgressions and sins” means that our destiny is damnation. Hell is what we deserve; hell is what we get. For our sinfulness of nature from the time we were conceived (cf. Psalm 51:5); for our sins of thoughts, words, actions, attitudes and behavior – for all these we deserve punishment in hell – “where their worm will not die and their fire will not quenched” (Isaiah 66:24b; cf. Mark 9:43-48 & footnotes). We deserve that place of outer darkness where there is only weeping and gnashing of teeth (cf. Matthew 8:12; 13:42&50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). You and I deserve to be thrown into the lake of sulfurous fire prepared for the devil, his demons and all sinners (cf. Revelation 20:10,14&15). We are sinners; hell is where we should be. But, the Sovereign LORD has taken action on our behalf.

The Sovereign LORD has taken action for us. He reveals this to his Old Testament Prophet Ezekiel. The Sovereign LORD takes action for us and for all through prophecy – through his Word prophesied – his Word proclaimed.

THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES LIFE II. THROUGH PROPHECY

The Sovereign LORD has shown to Ezekiel the valley full of very, very dead and lifeless bones. He has revealed to Ezekiel that these bones “are the whole House of Israel” (37:11a). Now the Sovereign LORD directs Ezekiel to do something, which goes way beyond human understanding: “Speak to these very, very dry and lifeless bones, Ezekiel.”

⁴ Then [the Sovereign LORD] said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the Word of the LORD! ⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD [Lord LORD] says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ I will attach tendons [sinews] to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’”

⁷ So I [Ezekiel] prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸ I looked, and tendons [sinews] and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them ... (37:4-8a).

Ezekiel was to prophesy – to speak – to these very, very dry and lifeless bones. He was to speak, however, not his own words but the words that the Sovereign LORD gave to him. The Sovereign LORD also described for Ezekiel what would happen at this prophesying. Bone would come together with its matching bone. Tendons, sinews and muscles, flesh and skin would come upon these bones. No longer would they be very, very dry dead and lifeless bones. That is exactly what happened.

Bone came together with bone – 🎵 “the toe bone connected to the foot bone; the foot bone connected to the ankle bone” and so on. Tendons, sinews, muscles, flesh and skin covered these bones. The form was now human form – but still dead – without life. There was no breath in them.

There was no breath in these beings as yet. They were still as good as dead. The Sovereign LORD instructs Ezekiel further,

⁹ ... Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, [Ezekiel] son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD [Lord LORD] says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’ ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath [Spirit] entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army (37:9,10)

What came into these slain – dry bones now covered with tendons, sinews, muscles, flesh and skin – what came into them was more than just the ability to breathe oxygen. The Sovereign LORD explains later,

¹² Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD [Lord LORD] says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you to the Land of Israel. ¹³ Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴ I will put my Spirit in

you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD” (37:12-14).

“I will put my Spirit in you and you will live,” says the Sovereign LORD. The result is that “a vast army” “came to life and stood up on their feet” (37:10b,c). No longer were they just human beings with tendons, sinews, muscles, flesh and skin; the Spirit of the Living Sovereign LORD was in them. Now they really were alive! And all of this took place through the prophesying of the Word of God as the Sovereign LORD directed Ezekiel.

APPROPRIATION

That is exactly, precisely what has happened to you and to me. It is not through our own thinking or choosing that we have been brought to saving faith in Jesus our Savior. You and I did not decide to believe. You and I did not choose Christ. Jesus says, “You did not choose me but I chose you” (John 15:16a). The Sovereign LORD chose you and me from eternity to be brought to faith in Jesus – to have this spiritual breath in us. This also is the message that St. Paul proclaimed in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians.

St. Paul wrote,

¹³ But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the LORD, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the Truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this through our Gospel, that you might share in the Glory of our LORD Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:13,14).

You and I were brought to faith in Jesus through the Gospel of Jesus – the Good News about Jesus. This Gospel comes to us through the Means of Grace – the Gospel in Word and Sacraments – Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Through this Gospel, the Holy Spirit does his sanctifying work – he brings people to faith and keeps them in faith. That is what he has done for you and me.

By that faith in Jesus, we live. No longer are we dry, dead bones covered only with tendons, sinews, muscles, flesh and skin. By Spirit-wrought faith in Jesus, we too are now part of that vast army of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, the Fellowship of All Believers in Jesus alone. In addition, the Sovereign LORD has placed his words into our hearts and minds and mouths, so that, like Ezekiel, we too are to prophesy.

Prophesy, sons and daughters of the heavenly Father. Prophesy and speak the words that the Sovereign LORD has given you in these Scriptures. Speak to those who are still dry dead and lifeless bones of how Jesus has given them eternal life in heaven by his suffering and death on the cross. Speak to them about Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, which is the public proclamation that the sins of the world have been forgiven. Prophesy to them God’s Word, so that the Holy Spirit may come into them. Speak to them so that they may join you and me and all believers of that vast army of the Holy Christian Church, which John saw in the Revelation given to him:

⁹ ... I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice:

**“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9&10).**

CONCLUSION

We celebrate Pentecost as more than just an historical event. We celebrate Pentecost, the harvest festival, because we are part of that harvest – the harvest of souls. Through the proclamation of the Gospel – the prophesying of that Good News about Jesus – you and I have been brought into the family of believers – the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, the Fellowship of All Believers in Jesus. You and I are part of that vast army, that great uncountable multitude of believers. Yet, there is still prophesying to be done.

There are still many who look alive but are in reality very, very dry lifeless and dead bones. You and I have been brought to life – to faith in Jesus – through the prophesying of the Word of God to us. You and I are now commanded, as was Ezekiel, to prophesy that same Word of the Sovereign LORD to others. Through that prophesying, the Holy Spirit will bring many more to life – to faith in Jesus – as the work of Pentecost, the harvest of souls, continues. Amen.