

13 March 2005  
Lent 5

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Can These Bones Live?”

Text: John 11:1-53 (Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 8:11-19)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

### ***Can these bones live?***

That was Ezekiel’s question.

That was Mary and Martha’s question.

It should be our question.

And not just at funerals.

But here. Today. Looking at ourselves. Looking at our own dry, dead bones. Dried up from chasing the ever-elusive pleasures, promises and satisfactions of this world. Dried up in the jumble and mess we often make of our lives. Dried up and dead in our trespasses and sins.

During this Lenten season, we acknowledge that sin, look at our bodies headed for our own funerals, and ask:

### ***Can these bones live?***

If we did not have God’s Word, the best we could say in response to that question is:

*“Gee, I hope so.”*

Not very comforting.

Imagine if that was our response to other questions in our lives! Another pastor I read once put it this way: What if someone asked you if your spouse was coming home from his or her business trip? What would you answer? *Gee, I hope so?* Or, is your child coming home on the bus? *Gee, I hope so.* Or, are you going to be paid this month? *Gee, I hope so.* (Daniel Preus, *Why I Am a Lutheran*, CPH, 21-22)

How could we live with such uncertainty?

Not being able to be sure about anything in life?

### ***Can these bones live?***

Today we hear the wonderful answer to that question.

With no uncertainty, no hesitation, no doubt.

The sure, certain, unwavering, truthful Word of God tells us.

***Can these bones live?*** Yes! Yes they can!

For ***I AM the resurrection and the life***, Jesus said.

He is the God named I AM.

He is not a god with a past or beginning; who *was* something, but *is now* something different. No. He is the I AM. He does not change.

He is not a god with a future or ending; who *is now* something, but *will be* something different. No. He is the I AM. He is trustworthy and sure.

Or in other words, He is the God who is. Always the same. And what He is we heard today: He is ***the resurrection and the life***.

And today we heard: He gives what He is.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and all living creatures. From nothing. Simply because He willed to give. Simply because He willed to love. And so He spoke. And with His words ***“Let there be,”*** there was.

*He is as we confess in the Creed: The Lord and giver of life.*

We heard earlier of the dry bones of Ezekiel. They were the bones of Israel’s rebellion. Of her unfaithfulness. The result of her sin in chasing after other gods, the gods of this world. And yet God gives life to these dry bones. With the simple words of prophesy, the bones come to life. Because God willed to give. He willed to love.

*He is as we confess in the Creed: The forgiver of sins.*

And then we heard of Lazarus. Dead. Four days in the grave. Another victim of the wages of sin. And not just sin in general, but his sin. And yet God wills to give life. He wills to love. And so He speaks: ***“Lazarus, come out.”*** And with those simple words, Jesus raises a dead man.

*And so because of Him we confess in the Creed: I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.*

He is ***the resurrection and the life***. And He gives what He is.

But that is true not only because of who God is, and because Jesus is the God who is I AM. But most importantly for us, it is true because Jesus gave what He is in another way. Because He who is the Life gave His life for us on the cross.

Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, as we heard, plotted to take it from Him.

But no one could take His life.

For He is the Life.

Only He could give it. Only He could lay it down. (John 10:18)

Caiaphas didn’t know what he was saying. He didn’t know what he was doing, either.

But Jesus knew full well.  
He knew those who opposed Him.  
He knew those who were plotting against Him.  
For there was in reality not many enemies, but one enemy.  
He knew that the signs and miracles He was performing, and the Word He was teaching,  
and the life He was giving, was rousing His ancient enemy, Satan.  
For all that Jesus is Satan hates.  
No one loves life more than Jesus. No one hates life more than Satan.  
No one hates death more than Jesus. No one loves death more than Satan.  
So Jesus laying down His life was, for Satan, an offer too good to refuse!  
The worm on that hook was too fat to pass up!  
Caiaphas thought he was saving his nation. Satan thought he was saving his kingdom.  
Only Jesus knew the truth.  
He was saving the world.  
He was saving you and me.  
So we would know the answer.

***Can these bones live?***

He who is the Life showed us in His resurrection: Yes! Yes they can!  
And He showed us through the dry bones of Ezekiel, and through the raising of Lazarus,  
the reality that is waiting for us.  
That our bones can live.  
And do live. Even now.

For note carefully what Jesus said about Himself.  
He said, ***I AM the resurrection and the life.***  
The order is important.  
We tend to think the other way.  
Yes, God has given me my life, and then I will die, and then He gives resurrection.  
That's what Martha thought.  
Yes, Lord. Lazarus will rise on the last day.

But these dry bones don't have to wait until the last day to live!  
Just as we didn't wait until our last day to die, but are already dead in our trespasses and  
sins; so we don't have to wait to live.  
Jesus is ***the resurrection and the life.***  
The order is important.  
For our life, our eternal life, does not just start on the last day – we have been given it  
already here and now.  
We have *already* been raised.  
By grace through faith.

For the One who is the resurrection and the life is here.  
And His Word is here.  
Here giving what He is.  
Giving resurrection and life, here and now.  
And when we are raised to new life in Him, that is when life *really* begins. True life.  
Eternal life.

And you have been raised., for you have been baptized.  
Before that day we look like Lazarus.  
Bound in our sin. At home in death and the grave. We stink.  
But in the water and Word of Holy Baptism, it is the voice of Jesus that tells us to “***Come out!***”  
And coming out of the water, we come out of the grave, and we live a new life.  
The resurrection and the life have been given to us.  
*And these dead bones live.*

And you have been raised, for you have received absolution. Forgiveness.  
For each week, each day, many times a day, we look like those dry bones.  
Our chasing after the things of this world, our rebellion, our messed-up, confusing lives  
have dried us up.  
We come, a heap of bones.  
And in the Word of absolution, it is the voice of Jesus that gives us life and breath again.  
***I forgive you all your sins.***  
The resurrection and the life have been given to us.  
*And these dry bones live.*

And you have been raised, for you eat and drink the body and blood of your Saviour.  
After a week of eating food drinking drink that does not satisfy; that only makes us  
hunger and thirst again, we come and eat the bread of life and drink the blood of the One  
who is the living water.  
And we are satisfied.  
For this divine food feeds us to eternal life.  
And the resurrection and the life have been given to us.  
*And these bones live.*

And not just for a while!  
These bones live now, and will live forever.  
The life our Saviour gives is no temporary life, but eternal life.  
And so when **faced with death** – either the death of a loved one, or our own impending  
deaths – *we know these bones can live.*

And when **faced with our sins** – which divide us from each other, and divide us from God, and cause death and destruction and dryness in our lives – *we know these bones can live.*

And when **faced with Satan** – whispering lies in our ears, telling us that we're not worthy, telling us that we've blown it too many times, telling us that the life we crave is just a myth – *we know these bones can live.*

We know it, for He is the resurrection and the life.

We know it, for His bones live.

We know it, for He gives what He is. We have His Word and promise.

***“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”***

And so we live in confidence.

For in Christ, our questions of life and death have been answered.

For in the battle of life and death, the Life has won.

And for those who are in Him:

Sin is not the last word; forgiveness is.

Death is not our future; life is.

And the grave is not our end; resurrection is.

For Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

And He is here.

***Can these bones live?***

Lord, I believe.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.