

27 May 2012
The Feast of Pentecost

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Dry Bones No More”

Text: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

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

I do not know anyone who goes to Arlington National Cemetery who is not struck by awe. Row after row after perfect row of grave markers. The precision of the guards at the tomb of the unknowns. Great care goes into maintaining that place because of what it means - it is a place of honor, of respect. It is an important place people go to remember those who laid down their lives for our nation and our freedom, especially on this Memorial Day weekend.

But it's a place that was never meant to be. When God created the world, He didn't create cemeteries, He created a garden, for He created us to live, not die. The earth was never meant to contain the bodies of men. It is sin that makes such places necessary. It is sin that brought death into the world. The world is God's creation; cemeteries are our creation.

There's a place like that in New York City now, a memorial where the World Trade Center used to be. Last weekend, my family and I went there. It, too, is a place of honor and respect and awe. It was built with great care and precision and meaning; row after row after perfect row of the names of those who lost their lives that day. It is an important place people go to remember . . .

But it, too, is a place that was never meant to be. It too is a place caused by sin. When God created man, He created us to live together, not apart; to live in peace, not war. It is sin that divided Adam from Eve, mankind from God, and nation from nation. Unity is God's creation; division is our creation.

The prophet Ezekiel stood in the midst of a place very similar to those places, it seems to me. A valley full of dry, dead bones. *This place, too, was never meant to be.* Israel was God's special people; a people of His creation. Israel went to Egypt as a family; they came out a nation. God brought them out of Egypt with mighty, awesome signs. He rescued them, cared for them, provided for them, and dwelt with them.

But they turned away from God, their life-giver. Sin again worked its divisive work,

and separated from God, they died. The people died, the nation died, and all that was left was dry, dead bones. Everywhere Ezekiel looked. As far as the eye could see. This was Israel. Dry and dead.

Or maybe, maybe dry bones are what you see in the mirror every morning. You don't have to be dead to be dry bones. Israel, as a nation, was dried up and dead in sin and idolatry long before the Babylonians came and finished the job. And maybe you've been in such a place, or still are. Contentment, fulfillment, life, seem far away. You're overrun with doubt and despair, or grief and pain. Even when you try so hard to do the right things, all it has gotten you is dried out and dead. And though everything may look fine on the outside, inside you're dried out. Living bags of dry bones. Been there?

Son of Man, can these bones live?

That's the question, isn't it? Whether you're standing in a valley of dry, dead bones, or in a cemetery of white grave stones, or at a place in a city with large holes in the ground with voids in the middle you cannot see the bottom of . . . or when you're standing at the bed side of a loved one who has just died, or you're on your knees praying because sin has, once again, ripped your life apart and caused pain and separation, or you're just looking in the mirror at a tired, dried out mess . . . *can these bones live?* Is there any hope for life in the midst of sin and death?

Well, **another Son of Man** answered that question for us once and for all! As we have been celebrating this whole Easter season, Jesus is the Son of God who became a Son of Man, to come and give us life again. And He did. For everywhere He went, what happened? *Life happened*. Wherever the Son of Man went, there wasn't death, but life. Sinners forgiven, the diseased healed, lepers cleansed, the blind given sight, the deaf given hearing, the mute given voice, the paralyzed walking again, the demon-possessed restored, and the dead raised. *Life happened*.

But even more than that, Jesus didn't just come to **give** life, even more, He came to **take** our sin and death. And so born in our human nature, the Son of God made Son of Man took all of our life-stealing sin upon Himself. All of it. All our rebellion, idolatry, greed, anger, hate, covetousness, resentment, pride, murder, adultery, lust - all of it . . . and on the cross, became a sack of dry, dead bones. For that's what sin does. Sin isn't harmless. Don't believe anyone who tells you it is. "*But I'm not hurting anyone else*" is one of satan's most fantastic - and effective - lies. All sin hurts. It hurts you, it hurts others, it divides, and it kills. Just look at the cross.

And so for you - dry you, hurting you, sinful you - Jesus came and entered those voids of sin and death and grave that are our creation, to give us an answer to that question once and for all. ***Son of Man, can these bones live?*** Yes! Easter is God's

resounding yes! Yes, these dry, dead bones can live. For in Jesus' resurrection, we see there is One who has atoned for our sin, who defeated death, and who conquered the grave. **And because He did, He is able to do the same for you.** To pull you out of the void. To forgive your sins. To give you comfort and hope. To give you life. And not only on the last day, but already here and now. For Ezekiel's vision was of *the whole house* of Israel, and that includes you. And so yes, for you too, your tired, old, dry, dead bones can live!

Now, I know what you're thinking: *Pastor, today is Pentecost, not Easter. Did you pull out an old Easter sermon to preach today by accident?* Well, no. :-) The fact of the matter is: *no Easter, no Pentecost.* And if we try to celebrate Pentecost apart from Easter, we'll get it wrong. We celebrate Pentecost today not because Easter is over and in the rear view mirror of the church year, but because **Pentecost is the culmination and completion of Easter.** For just as the Spirit completed the resurrection of the dry bones, so the Spirit completes the resurrection of Jesus **for us**, by - as Jesus explained in the Holy Gospel today - ***taking what is Jesus' and declaring it to us.*** And through that declaration, giving it to us.

And so the Spirit takes Jesus' life and gives it to us. He takes Jesus' forgiveness and gives it to us. He takes Jesus' resurrection and gives it to us. He takes all that Jesus won for us in His death and resurrection and gives it to us. The Spirit is God's Yes! to the question ***can these bones live?*** For those who have the Spirit of God are dry, dead bones no longer, but living members of Christ's Bride, the Church.

And that is what happened on that first Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and they began to speak, so that people of every nation and language heard of the mighty works of God - the mighty work of Jesus' death and resurrection. *And that's why they were so amazed.* We are not told that they were amazed at the mighty rushing wind or the tongues of fire, things we usually think should bring amazement! That's Pentecost without Easter. No, ***they were amazed and perplexed*** at each of them ***hearing the Word of God in their own language.*** And we find out later what the result of that hearing of the Word of God was: 3,000 people were raised to new life that day through Holy Baptism. The Holy Spirit took the forgiveness and life and resurrection of Jesus and poured it out in a great way.

And that was just the beginning. For ever since that day, the Spirit of God has been at work in the world and in you. On Pentecost we celebrate not just something that happened some 2,000 years ago, but what is still happening today, as the Spirit continues to come to us and work Easter in us through the Word and Sacraments, still giving us life, still forgiving our sins, still keeping us connected to Jesus and His resurrection. Give hope, giving life. Making every day Easter for us. Every day a new day in Christ.

That's why in the Creed we call the Spirit *The Lord and Giver of life*. Indeed He is. For the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters in the beginning when all life was created. The Spirit of God was breathed into Adam and he became a living being. The Spirit of God enters the Valley of Dry Bones and brings them to life. And the Spirit of God now comes to us in the Word of God, taking what is Christ's and declaring it, giving it, to us. Raising us to life in Holy Baptism. Giving us forgiveness in Holy Absolution. And feeding us with the Bread of Life in Holy Communion. For where Christ is, *life happens*. Where His Spirit is, *life happens*.

That's why we do not have an Arlington Cemetery or a 9-11 Memorial to go to as Christians. That's quite different than other religions. Muslims go to Mecca, Jews go to the Wailing Wall, but as Christians, we have no place to go . . . *because the one who laid down His life for us is risen from the dead!*

So what that means is that we don't go to Him, He comes to us. Not only sending His Spirit to give our dry, dead, sinful bones life again, but coming to us Himself in His Body and Blood, to feed this new life He has given us. Spiritual food for spiritual life. And here, He says, ***do this is remembrance of Me***. This is our place of awe; a place that was *always* meant to be. Our place of remembrance of not just what happened in the past, but what is happening now - our Saviour coming to us and feeding us, we in Him and He in us, and giving us life, that we might live now and live forever.

So next time you look in the mirror, or find yourself looking at dry, dead bones of life, or are stuck in the midst of sin and trouble - remember that. Remember: ***Son of Man, these bones can live!*** In Christ. For in Christ, there is always hope. In Christ, there is always life. And He has given you His Spirit of life, and so you, Son of Man, live. Dry bones no more.

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.