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Lent 5

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“I AM the Resurrection and the Life”

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

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

Can these bones live? That is the question at the heart of the Scriptures today. It is the question at the center of our lives as well. At funerals, at cemeteries. But not only at those places. But also here. Today. Looking at ourselves. Looking at our own dry, dead bones. Dried up from chasing after the things of this world. Dried up from trying to live up to all the expectations of others. Dried up from doubts and fears and broken promises. Dried up and dead in our trespasses and sins. Especially 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.” Which is not very comforting. Imagine if that was your response to other questions in your life. Does your spouse love you? *Gee, I hope so.* Are you getting paid this month? *Gee, I hope so.* Is that airplane safe? *Gee, I hope so.* Does your surgeon know what he's doing? *Gee, I hope so.* How could we live with such uncertainty? Not being able to be sure about anything in life? The truth is, we couldn't. ***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. And today we heard: He gives what He is.

Yet this is not new. He has always been doing this. Our giving God, giving what He is. Giving life.

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, with the breath of His Spirit, 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 we confess in the Creed: I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.*

Three different stories, yet are they not all really the same? Jesus is the one, true God in the flesh. There is no other. He is **the resurrection and the life**. And He gives what He is.

But that is true not only because of who God is, 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 really 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 to good to refuse! The worm on that hook 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 again, 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.

That 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 and Spirit are 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.

And you *have* been raised, for you have been baptized. Before that day we look, spiritually, 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 the Word and Spirit of God does its work. We come out of the water. We come out of the grave. We live a new life. The resurrection and the life are 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. The sin in us has left us dried 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.*** And the Word and Spirit of God does its work. The resurrection and the life are 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 and 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. The Word and Spirit of God does its work. The resurrection and the life are given to us. *And these bones live.* These bones live now, and will live forever. For the life our Saviour gives is no temporary life, but eternal life.

Which means that when **faced with death** – either the death of a loved one, or our own impending deaths – *we know these bones can live.*

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.*

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, which we heard again today from St. Paul: ***“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 ours is not a life of: *Gee, I hope so.* But of confidence. For in Christ, our questions of life and death have been answered. For in the battle of life and death, the Life 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. For you.

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.