

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

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, you alone know.”

⁴ Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!’ ⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ I will attach tendons 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 and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

⁹ Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign 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 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 prophesy and say to them: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back 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.” **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Friends,

When we think of Pentecost and the work of the Holy Spirit we usually think of that scene described in our 2nd lesson where the Holy Spirit came on the disciples in a very visible way. The results of the Holy Spirit’s work was evident in the way the disciples preached and in the amount of people that came to faith as the Holy Spirit continued to work through the Word of God that was proclaimed that day. The work of the Holy Spirit is evident in our lives – in the gift of faith we have and in our trust in Jesus as our Savior that hopefully is evident as we live our lives too..

But in this portion of scripture from the Old Testament we are reminded that wherever God’s Word is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit is at work. The Holy Spirit has always been at work in the lives of God’s people – even throughout the Old Testament times. It is the Holy Spirit that called Ezekiel to be God’s messenger and enabled him to preach the Word even though God’s people weren’t always so eager to hear it.

I. What an amazing ministry God gave Ezekiel. It certainly had its ups and downs but God gave Ezekiel these amazing visions to help him understand God’s message for the people. This particular message began with the valley of the dry bones. That must have been some sight – human bones for as far as one can see and then God had Ezekiel go back and forth in this valley

to see just how dead and dry these bones really were. And then that question, **“Son of man, can these bones live?”** and Ezekiel’s answer, **“O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.”**

In that answer, we get a glimpse of Ezekiel’s faith. Logically, the answer to God’s question should have been, “No. These bones are long dead. There is no life here.” But Ezekiel understood that with God, all things are possible – even bringing life to a pile of bones. Ezekiel knew that God brought him to this place for a purpose and that God’s lesson and message were just beginning.

“⁴ Then [God] said to me, ‘Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! ⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ I will attach tendons 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.’” And Ezekiel did just that. He prophesied to the bones as God commanded him and then he watched in amazement.

Try to imagine what Ezekiel saw. The picture and the sound as the bones came together and tendons and muscles formed and skin covered the bodies and all of a sudden there were eyes and ears. It almost sounds like a good horror movie and I would bet, as this was all happening, that Ezekiel couldn’t take his eyes off of what was going on. Then the noise stopped and now, instead of a valley of dry bones, Ezekiel now saw a valley of dead corpses.

But God wasn’t quite finished with this vision he had for Ezekiel. **“⁹ Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign 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 entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.”** As Ezekiel followed God’s command the breath of life entered this group of corpses and changed them into a vast, living army. Wow! What an amazing vision, but what did it all mean? What was the message that God wanted Ezekiel to convey to the people?

“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.’” Imagine being compared to a pile of dried up and dead bones. Not very comforting but that is how far the Children of Israel had separated themselves from God. Over time they had shifted their focus from faith in God and his promises to faith in the temple in Jerusalem and faith in their Jewish heritage. In other words, as long as the temple stood, they believed they would be saved. The temple became their false god. How foolish was that!

Yet, we are tempted to follow down the same path. It is easy to let other things take priority in our lives until our mindset takes the same turn and we think that as long as we are a member of the church we will go to heaven – we fall into the same foolishness of thinking that church membership saves.

That is why God let the Babylonians take the people into exile and why he allowed them to destroy the temple. He used the Babylonians to get rid of this false idol of the people and when

the temple was destroyed and the walls of Jerusalem torn down, the people lost all hope – they were in despair.

Sometimes God knocks down our false idols and destroys them too. He might use fire or flood or the economy to knock down the false idol that has been pulling us away from God and like the Children of Israel, we can easily despair and lose hope.

II. But God was not going to let his people despair just as he doesn't let us despair. Just as the Spirit brought life to all those corpses in the valley of the dry bones, so God was promising to bring spiritual life back to the Children of Israel. Not because they deserved it, but because that's what God's grace and mercy are all about. God promised to deliver the Children of Israel from exile and return them to their homeland where they could rebuild the temple and once again live a life of faithfulness to God. The power of the Holy Spirit would make this transformation in the people and once again give them faith and hope in God's Word and his promises.

The Holy Spirit has changed our lives and given us faith, forgiveness and the sure hope of everlasting life in heaven. We are alive in Christ and so that changes our attitude about life and how we approach each and every day. Just think about it for a minute. As a child of God, we are not just working for a paycheck but we are supporting our families as God expects. Kids, as a child of God, you are not just studying in school but you are using your minds to the best of your ability because the Lord has called you to make good use of your intellect. Parents, you are not just taking care of your kids but you are shaping the souls of God's own children who will be the next generation of believers that will carry God's Word to the world.

We do all this because we were once a sack of bones, dead in our sins, but the Holy Spirit breathed into us the breath of spiritual life which brought us the gift of faith. Through that faith our sins are forgiven and our lives are changed.

Today we celebrate this gift of the Holy Spirit and are thankful that he has changed us from a lifeless corpse to a living child of God. We are thankful that the Holy Spirit continues to work in our hearts to keep us faithful and part of God's family. We pray that the Holy Spirit continues to keep us strong in our faith as he continues to bring us God's love through Word and Sacrament. Amen.

Now may the Holy Spirit, who has given you life, preserve that life in each one of us and help us to serve God in all that we do. Amen.