

Rev. Shaun Arndt  
Sunday, May 19, 2024  
Ezekiel 37:1-14

*Come Holy Spirit, renew our hearts and kindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.*

*From dry bones to Life*

*Dear friends in Christ,*

The hot sun beats down on the desolate valley. There is no sign of life whatsoever. There aren't even vultures to cast a shadow from above, because there is nothing here for them. With every step, the prophet's foot touches bones – **dry bones** – **very dry bones**. In the waking dream of prophetic vision, everywhere Ezekiel turns there are lifeless bones, bleached white by the blazing sun, so dry they seem ready to crumble to dust. No life. No hope of life. Just dead, **dry bones**.

Until, that is, the Almighty **LORD** tells his servant to **prophesy**, to *preach* God's living and active Word: '**Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.**'

How utterly silly that looks and sounds to fallen human reason. What can a few words do in the face of that valley of death dehydrated of all hope?

But then it happens. The **noise** is faint at first, but then louder and louder. **Rattling** and shaking as bones skitter across the ground and join together with their mates. Whole skeletons form. In the **blink of an eye** (1 Corinthians 15:52), death and decay go into reverse as **tendons**, muscle, fat and **skin** appear!

The Word of God by which all things were made echoes through the valley and there is the sound of wind. You can't see this in English translation, but the words **breath, wind and** capital-s **Spirit**, as in the Holy Spirit, are all one and the same word in Biblical Hebrew.

So this is no ordinary wind that flows through this valley, but the work of the Holy Spirit, *the Lord, the Giver of Life*. And when that miracle wind unleashed by preaching God's Word enters the lifeless bodies, **They came back to life**.

**From dry bones to life** – this is what God the Holy Spirit does through **the word of the LORD**.

But what does it all mean? What does this vision picture? It is the assurance that no matter how hopeless the situation looks, the Holy Spirit brings life through God's Word!

Ezekiel's first audience, Israelites living about 6 centuries before Jesus desperately needed this message. For at that time, they cried: **'Our bones are dried up. Our hope is lost. We have been completely cut off.'**

Humanly speaking, their situation was as hopeless as a valley of dead, dried up bones. Jerusalem was destroyed. The LORD's temple leveled. The survivors lived as captives, exiled in far off Babylon.

How could the Jews continue as a nation? More importantly, how could God's promise be kept that the Savior of the world be born in that little town of Bethlehem when the people of promise were prisoners in Babylon?

If you don't see how hopeless that sounds, consider this: when was the last time Midianite President visited the United States? When was the last time Edom or Moab was featured in the news? You see, those ancient nations no longer exist. They scattered and disappeared after Babylon took them into exile.

But that would not happen to Israel and the promise of the Savior. Instead God told Ezekiel to **prophesy**, to preach to the "dried up bones" of God's people in exile: **Hear the Word of the LORD: I am going to open your graves and raise you up from your graves and bring you back to the soil of Israel... I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live. I will settle you on your own land.**

To a nation in exile, 1,000 miles away from home, oppressed by an ancient world power, those words had to sound as silly and as hopeless to human reason as preaching to a valley of dead, lifeless bones. But this was the living and active Word of God.

It began faintly, another prophet, Jeremiah encouraged the people and told them the exile would end in 70 years. Then the Lord placed another prophet, Daniel, in the highest levels of government in the nations that hold Israel captive. Finally, Cyrus the Great makes a famous decree that the Jews can return and build the temple – and not only can you read his decree in the Bible, but you can also look at an ancient Persian copy of that decree in the British Museum!

Once again, the Holy Spirit used the life-giving Word to raise hopeless Israel **from dry bones to life**. Once again, the people of promise lived in Galilee, Nazareth, Capernaum, Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

And then at the right time, the Holy Spirit created a miracle of life in the womb of the Virgin Mary as the Word of God was made Flesh and the Son of God, Jesus Christ, came to be **the Resurrection and Life** for a world of dead sinners!

But there's still more for us to take away from Ezekiel's vision of **dry bones to life**. This vision speaks of a **very, very large army**. That seems to picture far more than just the handful of returning Jewish exiles in 500 BC.

It can also describe what happened that first Christian Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus rose from the dead.

There were only a little over 100 believers in Jerusalem. In all the world, the whole Christian church had just 12 called workers – and we think our called worker shortage is bad! And their mission was to carry the gospel to all the world in the face of hostility, unbelief and brutal persecution.

But once again the **LORD**, the Lord Jesus, said to His servants: **Prophecy... Hear the Word of the LORD**. And as Peter preached that day and there was a rattling of **dry bones** – this time of unbelieving hearts carried to repentance and faith in Jesus as the Holy Spirit worked through His Word in the Apostles' preaching and baptizing and hundreds became thousands.

And still that **vast army** of believers grew. The message of forgiveness through Jesus spread to Samaria, Syria, Ethiopia, Greece, Rome, across Africa, Asia and Europe and finally to the Americas and Australia. And everywhere the Word went, the Holy Spirit was at work through it, gathering souls who will one day stand in that **very, very large army** of heaven described in the last book of the Bible: **a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language** (Rev 7:9).

A **very, very large army** of believers includes each of you who trust in Jesus.

**From dry bones to life** – this is what God the Holy Spirit does through **the word of the LORD**. That means the fact that we believe in Jesus and are here today to hear and treasure His Word is a miracle of the Holy Spirit every bit as great as **dry bones** coming to **life!**

After all, the Bible tells us we enter this world spiritually dead in sin and unbelief. The Apostle Paul uses similar language to Ezekiel's vision of dry bones when in Ephesians he tells us about our natural spiritual condition: **You were dead in your transgressions and sins** (2).

Let me illustrate this Bible truth using this **dry bone**, this deer skull. "Ok, skull, walk over here to me. C'mon what are you waiting for!?" "Oh, of course, you have no life. Let's make a deal, I'll meet you half way. Ok I did my part, why aren't you coming?" How about this: "Skull, I'll carry you, but first you must decide to let me do it and you have to ask me to come and get you. Well, what are you waiting for?!"

Ok, silly, ridiculous right!? This skull is dead. It can't make its way to me. It can't make a decision for me to help it. Not any more than dry bones can come to life by their own power.

But what is silly becomes sinful and blasphemous when it is said you can make a decision for Christ or accept the Lord into your heart by your own power or ability.

Scripture says we are **dead in sins**. Spiritually dead, we cannot do *ANYTHING* to save ourselves.

So God sent His Son Jesus Christ to rescue us from our sin – from the sin we were born with, the countless sins we have committed, the sin of unbelief. Christ took our punishment on the cross, paid for our sin and guarantees us life with God forever by His rising from the dead.

But Jesus' saving work for all the world only benefits those who trust in His forgiveness. But **dead in sins** we are as helpless as **dry bones**. Like this deer skull we could not believe in Jesus or come to him by our own power, we could not even decide to ask him for help.

No, faith requires a miracle of God every bit as big as **dry bones** coming to **life**. It is God the Holy Spirit who takes us **from** spiritually **dry bones to life** as He works through God's living and active Word!

And so once again, the Lord's command to **prophecy** to preach His Gospel went out to one of his servants. And a pastor spoke **the Word of the LORD** to our spiritually **dry bones** as he poured out water joined to the promise of the Almighty God: ***In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit***. In your baptism the Lord said it again, this time to you personally: **I will put my Spirit in you and you will live.**

Look around you this morning. You and all your believers are awesome miracles of God the Holy Spirit who took us from spiritual death to living faith in Christ, **from dry bones to life.**

You see, something every bit amazing as that vision of the valley of **dry bones** takes place right here in this worship space and in churches around the world as God's Word is read, preached and remembered.

The Holy Spirit still makes **dry bones** alive in Christ through the water and promise Word of baptism and then feeds and nourishes that new life with the forgiveness of sin in Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper.

As Sunday schoolers learn about Jesus, as we read and study our Bibles, it still happens today. We who were once spiritually dead, **dry bones** by nature, '**hear the word of the LORD**' and God keeps his promise: **I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live.**

The life the Holy Spirit gives us in Jesus will never end. It continues to joy and glory in His presence even when our bodies turn to bone and dust.

And then at the last trumpet, Christ will appear in glory and fulfill these words for our bodies too: **My people, I am going to open your graves and raise you up from your graves! From dry bones to life** with Jesus forever! Amen.

*Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew right spirits within us. Cast us not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from us. Restore unto us the joy of your salvation and uphold us with your free Spirit. Amen.*

*We confess our Christian faith in the Holy Spirits miraculous new life of faith worked by God's Word as we speak together Luther's meaning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> article printed in the worship folder insert.*