

Whenever we gather in the cemetery for a Christian burial, the question that was put to the prophet Ezekiel is front and center before us: Can these bones live? The answer is in the affirmative as together we confess: “I believe... in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” When it comes to life after death, we Christians are filled with confident hope. We can all point to at least a few places in Scripture where the promises of God give us such assurance. Can the bones out there in the ground live? Yes, we all declare, and with certainty. And how blessed we are to be able to speak with this assurance. But what about the bones in here. Your bones and mine. Can these bones live?

The vision God gave to Ezekiel was about people, His people, who were alive, not dead. Living in exile, far away from their homes, strangers in a strange land, God’s people, though very much alive, felt as if they were dead. They felt like bones, dry bones, having no life in them. They had lost all hope. Would they ever be restored? Would they ever be returned to their homes? These people, these exiles, can these bones live? Ezekiel did not answer with certainty. He did not have the assurance that we have when we gather in the cemetery. Rather, his answer was not that he knew for certain that they could live, but “*O Lord God, You know.*”

We may have the same uncertainty as Ezekiel. And yet we are ashamed to admit it because Christians are supposed to be confident, aren’t they? We have confidence at a funeral. We love Easter and believe what it proclaims. But we’re not so sure about Pentecost and what it teaches. And so we become Christians who believe in the resurrection of the dead but not in the resurrection of the living.

This is where God’s people were in Babylonia. With Job, they could say, “*I know that my Redeemer lives...and after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God!*” “After death we will see God, yes truly! But where is He now?”

When God’s people feel like dry bones, they may still believe in life after death, yet not so much in life before death. Is that us? Have we become dry bones in this way? Believing in the power of Easter, but not in the power of Pentecost?

Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones happened centuries before the Day of Pentecost. Yet the parallel between the two is strikingly similar. On Pentecost God poured out His Spirit and many repented of their sins and believed in the Lord Jesus, on that day and every day since. In his vision Ezekiel saw God breathing out His Spirit, the same Spirit, into the bodies of those who were dry bones. They came to life “*and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.*”

When God breathes out the Holy Spirit, life is bestowed on the dead and on the living. This is how man, from the dust, became alive in the Garden of Eden. This is what Jesus did for His disciples, breathing upon them the Holy Spirit on the evening of Easter. This is what happened on Pentecost, and three thousand were baptized into Christ Jesus. This is what Ezekiel saw in his vision. And this same breathing out of the Holy Spirit is taking place here today.

Whether you are dead or alive; whether you have fallen away from Jesus, as too many Christians do every day, resulting in spiritual death, or whether you are alive in Christ, He is here today for you. His Spirit is being breathed out upon you as His living words come into your ears.

There is no life apart from the Spirit of God. But the reverse is also true. Where the Spirit of God is at work, there bones come together, bone to bone, muscles and flesh cover them, life is breathed into them, and they stand on their feet and walk with Jesus as the army of God. Onward they go as His very own Christian soldiers.

My friend, Easter means that you will live even though you die, for Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, and you are baptized into His death and resurrection. Pentecost means that the life you live now, before you die, you live by faith in the Son of God into whom you are baptized.

Now there are days when you and I are robbed of the joy, the confidence, and the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus. And when those days become weeks, and months, even years, we become like dry bones. Alive, yet feeling as though dead. Feeling perhaps like the exiles in our text.

And we should know that they were in exile because of their sinfulness. They had turned their backs on God. And so, not out of anger, but out of grace, He let them become like dry bones so that they might thirst for His Spirit.

I hope you came here today as such a dry bone. The only reason for your being here is because you thirst for that which God here gives you. If you are a dry bone in need of the Spirit of God, in need of forgiveness for your sin, in need of Jesus' body and blood, then you are truly blessed, and you will depart in peace and joy, for all these gifts, and more, God gives you in Word and Sacrament.

You see, it is okay to be a dry bone. For it is upon dry bones that God breathes out His Spirit. It is dry bones who are given life by the Spirit. It is dry bones whose sins are taken away. Your sins, my friend, are taken from you and given to Jesus. Your sins brought you here today. But you cannot leave with them because they belong to you no more. You are forgiven. Jesus' death and resurrection proclaims this. And the Holy Spirit makes it yours, giving you faith to believe that God truly forgives even you.

You are not just people of Easter, my friends. You are also people of Pentecost. Yes, you will live even after you die. Rejoice in this. But you also live now in Christ and are raised with Him. The same Spirit Ezekiel saw, the same Spirit that was poured out on Pentecost, is here today declaring Christ Jesus to you, and you are resurrected, revived, lifted out of your sins. However dry your bones, your life in Christ has purpose, meaning, and hope. Amen..