

HEARING THE WORD OF THE LORD

He is Risen!

Hear again the Word of God for this second Sunday in the season of the Resurrection of our Lord:

*Then He said to me, "Son of man, prophesy upon these bones, and you say to them, 'O dry bones, all of you hear (the) Word of YHWH!'"<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

One week has passed since the wonderful remembrance of the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ was again proclaimed in the Church. A lot can, and does, happen to us mortal humans in a week. Jobs can disappear, employment can begin. Bank accounts may dwindle, checks may bounce. Loved ones may die, or be born. People may be taken prisoner by pirates, or captives may be freed. A lot may happen in a week.

For the some of the disciples mentioned in our Gospel reading, the week after Jesus' resurrection was a week spent experiencing the incredulity, and then joy, of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. For others, it was a week that still held doubts about Jesus', and their own, final outcomes. For still others, the week provided opportunities to know Jesus in His Word (like it was for those walking with Him on the road to Emmaus).

It is the knowing of God and the experiencing the resurrection of the dead in His Word that our theme leads us to today. The emphasis on hearing the Word of the Lord began for us in the reading of the Psalm. There I said, *by the Word of the Lord the*

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 37:4.

*heavens were made, and you responded, and by the breath of His mouth all their host.*<sup>2</sup> The theme of the “breath of God,” the Spirit working through the Word of God continued in our Old Testament reading, as it has been declared in our theme verse:

*Then He said to me, “Son of man, prophesy upon these bones, and you say to them, ‘O dry bones, all of you hear (the) Word of YHWH!’”*<sup>3</sup>

God’s Spirit’s working faith, forgiveness and life through His Word continued to find emphasis in this week’s Epistle. The progression of thought regarding the Word and the Spirit moves the hearer, you, onward and upward in that reading. With these words, God intends that you place your confidence in His confession worked in you through the Word:

*And the Spirit remains the Witness, because the Spirit remains the Truth.*<sup>4</sup>

In the Spirit of God, you know the Truth that was proclaimed from the Word of God present in the midst of His disciples. Eight days after Jesus was first seen living, having been raised from the dead, He again appeared to His doubting followers (and all were doubting, for they still locked the doors of their meeting hall). It was a week after most of them had first witnessed the resurrected Lord in their midst, and they still feared for their personal safety! How like us they are. They had the Word, they heard the Word, most of them even believed fully in the Word – and yet they doubted! Yet, in the middle of their on-going fear, doubt, wonder and misbelief,

*Jesus comes, with the doors having been locked, and He stood in the middle and He said. “Peace be to all of you.”*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 33:6

<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 37:4.

<sup>4</sup> I John 5:6b

That was the third time that Jesus had pronounced the Lord's peace upon His disciples locked behind closed doors. As they are His Word, through which His Spirit works (and He had breathed the Spirit upon them the week before) they bring true comfort and blessing.

This reality of the Word is proclaimed to bring the peace and comfort of the Lord to you, dear Christians, today. Though you cannot physically see Jesus right now, He sees you, and hears your words, your thoughts, and is prepared to give you His peace. You trust that to be true because God has given you His Faith that continues to say about you: *Blessed be the ones not beholding, yet believing!*<sup>6</sup> We are living in the time Jesus promised, when those who have not seen Him physically, believe because they have beheld Him spiritually where He has promised to be – in the proclaimed Word and in His sacraments. It was a time foretold centuries before the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was declared by God through the prophet Ezekiel, as we hear again the Word of the Lord,

*Then He says to me, "Son of man, can these dry bones live?"*

*And I said to Him, "Lord God, You know!"<sup>7</sup>*

God had taken the prophet in the Spirit to a place where He gave a vision to him. In that waking dream there was a vast plain, in the midst of mountains, a valley, in which there was scattered about a great multitude of absolutely lifeless bones. There was

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<sup>5</sup> *John* 20:26.

<sup>6</sup> *John* 20:29b.

<sup>7</sup> *Ezekiel* 37:3

no doubt in the prophet's mind that the bones in his sight were devoid of all life, for not even the marrow that produces the blood was left in them.

Ezekiel was given a sign of what was to come, a vision to be preached to the remnant of the people of God who were under captivity and oppression on account of their sins. To ensure that the faithful of that generation, and all generations to come, would grasp the meanings of this vision, God asks the prophet a question whose answer requires faith, when He says, *"Son of man, can these dry bones live?"*

The prophet was still a man. He, though rich in the Faith, and endowed with the Spirit of God, still doubted that which he beheld in the Word being revealed to him. He responds to the Lord's question, as you have heard, *"Lord God, You know!"*

There is comfort there for you who have the Faith, and yet who doubt the Word at times. If the great prophet of God's ancient people, Ezekiel, who personally witnessed many a great wonder at the Lord's Word, could respond tentatively to the Lord's question about His ability to raise the dead, then so might you. You, while you are fully a child of Our Father by virtue of the Water and Word of Holy Baptism, are still a child of our father Adam. In his nature you will doubt God's Word. Yet as you remain in the Faith, He will declare His Word to be true for you, just as He declared to Ezekiel out of his doubt:

*"Son of man, prophesy upon these bones, and you say to them, 'O dry bones, all of you hear (the) Word of YHWH!'"<sup>8</sup>*

A deep and wonderful lesson to be drawn into you from the text is that it is

the Word of God, mediated by His chosen man, which God uses to bring life from death. God could have spoken directly to the dry bones. He doesn't need man's voice to mediate His Word. But, God knows that those who are dead on account of sin cannot bear His Voice or to be in His Presence. Therefore, He speaks to His chosen preacher, and gives him the Word that will bring life to the dead.

This shows God's love for His fallen creatures. He chooses, calls out, a man from His people. He gives His Word into that man's ears and from there into his heart. From there, the Life-giving Spirit brings the Word out from the preacher's lips that it might go forth and bring life. This is God's pattern of bringing His Word to those whom He has chosen to be His people.

And it was a pattern not reserved just for the people of the Old Covenant. It is also God's method for communicating His Word to the people of the New Covenant. Jesus says to those Ten men who will be soon sent forth by Him to be preachers of the Good News:

*Peace be to all of you. Just as the Father sent Me, also I send all of you.*<sup>9</sup>

Just as God did with the preacher of Life from the Old Covenant, Ezekiel, now in the New He does through His preachers of Life. In the Old Testament, God called the preacher to prophesy to the Spirit that life might come to a people overcome by death. In the New Testament, God calls the preachers to prophesy out of the Spirit who in-dwells them that He has given to them, that life might come to a people overcome by

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<sup>9</sup> Ezekiel 37:4.

death. In both Testaments, it is God Who comes to those who are dead on account of sin, to call them forth to life by His instruments, His preachers of the Good News. In both Testaments, the call is to hear the Word of YHWH, and to receive life, faith and resurrection as God's Holy People. Are you grasping the wonderful simplicity of God's chosen means, and His use of men as His instruments to bring life to the dead?

The means of salvation is the proclaimed Word. The instruments that communicate that Word are the men God calls throughout time to be His sent ones, His messengers of the Good News. The power of that Word is not dependent upon the courage, skill, personal charisma, or public speaking talent of the chosen preachers. The power of the Word is dependent upon God. It is the preacher's task to proclaim it as it has been given, without adding or subtracting from it.

That reality was displayed in Ezekiel's faithful proclamation of that which God gave Him to prophesy. He who first refused to confess His faith that the dry bones could live, having witnessed the sinews, flesh and skin come upon them, was called to preach the Spirit of life into the corpses lying as a multitude slain before him.

*And YHWH said to me, "Prophesy to the Spirit. Prophesy O son of man, and say to the Spirit, 'Thus says (the) Lord YHWH: from the four winds come, and breathe in these slain ones and they will live!'"<sup>10</sup>*

The Church of the Old Testament, in which Ezekiel preached, was a Church which did not have the Spirit of God dwelling in every believer. It was a Church that faith was worked out of the hope of the Promise to come. It was a Church in which the

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<sup>9</sup> John 20:21.

Spirit of Life came only to a few, almost all of whom were born of the line of their ancestor Isaac.

God, in calling the prophet to prophesy to the Spirit, from the four winds, was indicating that a time was coming when His people would include those from all parts of the earth. The four winds represent the four points of the compass: in other words, the entire world. The people who will become alive by the Spirit are those who are the people of God. They are all who have the Spirit of Life breathed by the preaching of the Word into them.

They are you and me. We are living in the time foreseen by the prophet Ezekiel. We who were captives to sin, have had sin slain in us. (Remember, we have died with Christ in the Water and Word of Holy Baptism). We are the ones who are part of the multitude enlivened by the Word, and gathered into the Church by God. (Remember we have been raised to new life with Christ in the Water and Word of Holy Baptism). That is real now. But there is more for those in whom the Breath of Life has entered through the preaching of the Good News. God says,

*And I will gift My Spirit in all of you, and all of you will live. And I will gift you upon your lands. Then you will know this, "I YHWH have spoken. And I have done it," says YHWH.*<sup>11</sup>

There is a time coming for us when the whole vision of Ezekiel comes to completion. That will be the End of Days when all who have died in life to live with Christ forever rise from the dust and stand upon their own feet, and with their own eyes

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<sup>10</sup> Ezekiel 37:9.

behold the Lord. That Day is sure and certain, for, in the Lord's sight, in His mind, and in His eternity He has declared that He has already done it!

You are free to know that the resurrection of the dead, your resurrection from the dead should you sleep in death before Jesus returns on the clouds, is assured. The proof you have is that Jesus was not bound forever in death. His resurrection means that your resurrection, and all those who are God's people in the Faith is sure. The Day that Ezekiel saw has come. It is fulfilled in eternity in Christ, just as it will be surely completed in time. That is why we boldly continue to declare: He is risen!

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Resurrection II (*LSB* One-year series)

Ezekiel 37:1-14; I John 5:4-10; John 20:19-31

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**SOLI DEO GLORIA**

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<sup>11</sup> *Ezekiel* 37:14.