

THE TRUE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL IS THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

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!'"¹

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

One week has passed since the Church celebrated the wonderful remembrance of the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. A lot can, and does, happen to us mortal humans in a week. The number of people looking for gainful employment can drop to their losing hope. Others can be offered new careers. Loved ones may die, or be born, or be born again in Christ. A lot can happen in seven days.

As a few heard here throughout this week, some of the Jesus ' first disciples experienced in the mornings, days, and evenings of the first week after Jesus' resurrection from the dead disbelief, misbelief, and then belief with joy. Others remained in doubt about Jesus' having been raised from the dead, and from those fears, had grave concerns about their own personal welfare.

That the Son of Man's, the Messiah's, the Son of God's (all terms for the same Christ – Whom you know to be Jesus) resurrection was foretold for generations to the faithful is no mystery – to us. Those who fell asleep in the promises of the Lord awaiting their fulfillment clung throughout their mortal lives to texts such as we have

¹ Ezekiel 37:4.

received today from the Prophet Ezekiel. His words teach, to those whose ears are open, and whose hearts have not been hardened to God's Good News, that *the true restoration of Israel is the resurrection of Christ*.

It is the revelation of God and the confession of the resurrection of the dead in Christ that our theme just read is given to point us to today. Throughout the text of the vision God gave to Ezekiel (the first ten verses you heard this morning), and God's interpretation of the vision, we learn of the reality that God has determined in Himself, to raise up all the faithful – termed Israel in the text – from the dead. This He accomplishes through the hearing of the Word that the Faithful Who was slain for the sins of God's people, has been raised from the dead.

It is the Spirit of the Living God, working through the Word, which is the "breath of Life," to Whom Ezekiel is to prophesy. The Holy Spirit alone is the life-giver, He who was with the Father and the Son at creation, Who was breathed-into Adam to grant him life from the dust of the earth. It is that same Spirit, the Breath of Life, Whom Jesus breathed into His gathered disciples, as He spoke peace to them. It is the Breath of Life, given to those who proclaim the Word which releases those who are captives – to sin, death, and hell – and binds those who are unrepentant in their sins. This Spirit now works through the Word, even as He did when Ezekiel was given the Word of God to declare to Him, as you heard:

And He said to me, "Prophesy to the Breath, prophesy, O son of Adam, and say to the Breath, 'Thus says Adonai YHWH: from (the) four winds come, O Breath, and breathe into these slain and they may live!'"²

How did God get the prophet to that point of proclamation?

The answer is: through a very circuitous route. That is to say, God took Ezekiel, *in (the) Spirit of YHWH, round and round a plain or valley*, in order to give him a total picture of the vastness of the dry bones scattered there. By that which latter developed into a rabbinic method, which the Son of God followed often in His incarnate, immediate, earthly ministry, through a series of questions and answers, God leads his preacher to behold that there is no possibility of life in the bones of the faithful, named here Israel. From that, when asked if those bones may live, the prophet declares the right confession of the Faith, as he says:

And I said to Him, "Lord God, You know!"³

That too, is the confession of those who have held fast into the Faith in the bodily resurrection of the dead to life eternal. I mean, it is really your confession that not only has Jesus, in Whom is the sum total of all Israel – all the faithful for all time – both death and resurrection. It is your confession of the Faith when you declare of brother or sister who has fallen asleep in the faith, whose bodies will be raised, even if they have returned to ashes and dust, whose bodies will be resurrected to everlasting life and joined with their immortal spirits on the Last Day. "Lord God, You know," is

² *Ezekiel 37:9*

³ *Ezekiel 37:3b*

an answer you may give whenever you are faced with the inscrutable God and His sometimes unclear to you, promises.

By returning to God the questions He asks – can the dead be raised; or your questions such as, “are my sins truly forgiven; will I see my loved ones again; what will the resurrection body be like?” you display to yourself that you are willing to trust in God, in His Word, in His life-breathing Spirit. To try to reason and rationalize all the mysteries of God is not faith, rather it is the human way to try to be in the mind of God in the things which He has not revealed. Such thinking is a sin.

It is a sin for which Christ died. It is a sin for which you who cling to the promises of God in Christ Jesus, the resurrection of Israel, may be forgiven. That you believe that is no work on your part. It is worked in you by the Breath of God. It is life to confess that God will bring forth life from dead, dry bones. Hear again the Word of the 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!’”⁴

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:

⁴ Ezekiel 37:4.

And the Spirit remains the Witness, because the Spirit remains the Truth.⁵

In the Truth of God, you know the witness that 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?"

"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 with the good confession of a trusting faith 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!'"⁶

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

⁵ *1 John 5:6b*

⁶ *Ezekiel 37:4.*

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.

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 the response of the dead to the call of the Lord. Those who had no life in them speak. Did you catch this revelation in the text as you heard it proclaimed? Hear it again:

And He said to me, "O son of Adam, these bones are all (the) House of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost, we are clean cut off.'"⁷

That means that, to God, the dead are alive. We know that the dead cannot

⁷ Ezekiel 37:11

speak, except through the recorded word. Thousands of years, billions of deaths, have proved that dead men, women, and children cannot answer to God anything we can hear. Yet, He who sees all, hears all. He declares, that, through the proclamation of the Word of Life the dead shall be raised, and shall stand a great and mighty army before the Lord. 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. ⁸

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 behold the Lord. That Day is sure and certain, for, in the Lord's sight, in His

⁸ Ezekiel 37:14.

mind, and in His eternity He has declared that He has already done it!

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