

May 19, 2024
The Day of Pentecost Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Ezekiel 37:1–14 (John 15:26–27, 16:4b–15; Acts 2:1–21)

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE.

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

Today is the Day of Pentecost, the day when the Christian Church commemorates the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. It's the same Spirit who was hovering over the face of the waters at creation, working with the Father and the Son, ordering creation out of chaos as the Word of God spoke all things into existence. (cf: Genesis 1:2)

We see this same Spirit of God at work in our Old Testament reading this morning. As Ezekiel preached over a valley of rattling, dry bones, the Spirit reconnected bone to bone and raised them to life. In our Gospel reading you heard Jesus' promise to send this same Spirit, the Helper, the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. The Spirit bears witness about Jesus, convicting the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. (cf: John 15:26–27, 16:4b–15) It's the same Spirit whom Jesus breathed on His disciples on the evening of His Resurrection, giving them joy and peace in the forgiveness of their sins. (cf: John 20:22–23)

In our second reading, (cf: Acts 2:1–21) it's fifty days after Jesus' Resurrection. Observant Jews had traveled from great distances to observe the Feast of Weeks in Jerusalem, which we New Testament Christians call the Day of Pentecost. As Jesus' disciples gathered together, the Spirit came with the sound like a rushing wind, rattling through house where they were sitting. The Spirit was poured out onto Jews from every nation, bringing them to repentance and faith in the crucified and risen Savior. Filled with the Holy Spirit, St. Peter did what Ezekiel did. He preached, and through His preaching of Christ crucified, God was creating for Himself a new Israel, the one holy Christian and apostolic Church.

Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit works through *preaching* and *Baptism* to raise people who're dead in their trespasses and sin, *spiritually dead* people, to *new life* in God through faith in Christ Jesus, just as you confessed earlier in the Nicene Creed, saying:

“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life.”

And this takes us back to our Old Testament reading where we see how the Holy Spirit is the Lord and giver of life.

A picture of a skull and crossbones is sure to get your attention. Once upon a time, if you were sailing the seven seas, a skull and crossbones on a flag warned you of a pirate ship, emphasizing the pirates' ruthless and deadly reputation. In modern times, the skull and crossbones is the international symbol for poison, because that picture is exactly what you'll look like if you ingest the poison. At Halloween, we see pictures of skulls and skeletons that are supposed to scare us

because a skeleton shows us the stark reality of death. Bare and lifeless bones are all that's left over after death and decay have had their way with a body. The older the bones get, the more brittle they become, sometimes even deteriorating to dust. When all that's left is bones – there's no hope for resuscitation back to life. Bones are a grim reminder of a life that used to be – but will never be again. Bones that're sun bleached and bare are about as devoid of life as you can get.

That's what Ezekiel saw in his vision. The hand of the Lord brought him out in the Spirit of the Lord and set him down in the middle of a valley filled with bones – bones that were so void of life, they were very dry bones. It was a nation of skeletons, representing the remains of moms and dads, men and women of all ages who had real life stories, real triumphs, and real sorrows. Death is the great equalizer. And these bones represent all who'd died from the house of Israel, who'd rejected God and had been attacked and butchered by her enemies. Each skeleton was dead under God's judgment and wrath.

As it was for Israel, so too, it is for you and me. Wherever and whenever human beings go by their own reason and strength away from God, **that** road leads to death. St Paul reminds us that the:

“... wages of sin is death...” (Romans 6:23)

God had forewarned Adam in the Garden of Eden of that fact saying:

“... of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:17)

All it took was one bite of the fruit and the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened. (cf: Genesis 3:7) Mankind's relationship with God was fractured. Through the man Adam, sin and death have spread to all mankind (cf: Romans 5:12) which means you and I have also inherited death. You know it's true. You've lost loved ones. You've been to their funerals. There's no denying that your day is coming unless Jesus returns real soon.

You, me, all of mankind are nothing more than an army of spiritual skeletons. Our bones are many more than Ezekiel's valley of dry bones because all mankind has sinned and falls short of the glory of God. (cf: Romans 3:23) You're dead in your trespasses and sins. (cf: Ephesians 2:1–2) Apart from the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, you're hung out to dry. You're mere dry, dusty, and dead bones left dead in your sins. The only future you have without the Lord and Giver of life is eternity in hell. That's the bad news. The good news is, where the Word of God is, there His Spirit gives life in His name. Even in your Valley of Dry Bones, there is life in Christ.

In the 1420's, Italian artist Fra Angelico painted a fresco that depicted the skull of Adam under the cross of Jesus, with Jesus' blood flowing down over the skull. (see last page) Angelico wanted to portray the truth that the redeeming blood of Jesus brings life to Adam and all his descendants. This is what the Gospel of Jesus is all about. Christ shed His blood to redeem dry and dead bones. His blood redeems you from sin, to rescue you from the devil, and to restore you to new life with God.

Interestingly, in the original Old Testament Hebrew language, there's one word that can be translated three different ways: "**breath,**" or "**wind,**" or "**S/spirit,**" (cf: BDB, 924) depending on the context. I tell you this because, where the promises of Christ Jesus are trusted, sinners have exactly what they declare: forgiveness, life, and salvation. In verse ten of our text, Ezekiel preached the Word of God over the dry bones and Word carried the Spirit and:

"... the breath came into them, [or we could translate it as "the spirit came into them"]... **and they lived and stood on their feet...**" (Ezekiel 37:10)

In his Concordia Commentary, Horace Hummel writes:

"As a person's body is "dust from the earth" (Gen 2:7), his breath is the same element as the wind or air that covers the earth. But no combination of the two will produce life without God's Spirit providing the life (see Job 33:4). [The word] "Breath" resonates with the verb[s] "breathe, blow" (Ezek 37:9), the same verb used for God "breathing" the breath of life into man in Gen 2:7." (Hummel, Ezekiel 21–48, Concordia Commentary, 1068)

It works the same way in your life. Faith comes through the hearing the Word of Christ. (cf: Romans 10:17) His words are "**spirit and life,**" (cf: John 6:63) and these words breathe new life into you with the forgiveness of sins and the promise of the resurrection of the dead.

God used Ezekiel to do the impossible. Through his preaching, the Spirit worked to restore Israel to life. Ezekiel's Spirit-filled words brought bones to life, but Jesus' words of "**spirit and life**" do something even greater. God uses Jesus' words – the very words proclaimed into your ears, even right now as you listen to this sermon, to give you eternal life. The Spirit brings you to life with God now and forevermore.

In our Creeds, we confess the Triune God – three persons but one essence. Those three persons cannot be separated. **Where** there is one – **there** are the other two. Likewise God's Word cannot be separated from the Spirit. The Spirit works through the Word to bring sinners to faith.

In every Baptism in the name of the Triune God and in every Gospel-delivering sermon, the Triune God is there – and it's a continuation of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is given by the power of Jesus' Word. God pours out the Spirit, who brings **Christ to you** and **you to Christ** in the waters of Holy Baptism. At the font **there** is a new creation. In Baptism spiritually dead people are raised to new life in Christ.

Ezekiel's vision was to remind the Israelites that God promised to revive their dead nation just as He had:

"... formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." (Genesis 2:7)

His vision foreshadows the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out on all nations. His vision foreshadows you and I, dead in our trespasses and sin – and it foretells of Christ Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life (cf: John 11:25) who will on the Last Day awaken all those who have died in Christ and sleep in the dust of the earth.

Once upon a time, you learned in Catechism that you cannot by your own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ your Lord or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel. You and I have just as much chance of leaving our sinful life behind and coming to faith in Jesus as dried-out bones could pull themselves together and come to life. But the Lord and giver of life has accomplished the impossible. He has brought you to faith in Christ Jesus.

Today we celebrate Pentecost as the end of the season of Easter. So we say it once more: ***“Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!”*** It’s Jesus’ resurrection life that the Lord and giver of life grants to you, a dry heap of bones. He calls you into the true faith so that you might have life with the Father now and forever.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.

