

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

Our Old Testament reading for today is one that I suspect each of us is at least somewhat familiar with and can recall.

- Perhaps more so than with many other Old Testament accounts.

We may not have thought in depth about what it means.....but the words and the account are so strange.....that I think each of us remembers it.

- Sometimes when you hear this account.....you may even think, yeah, its time for the dry bones account again.

It is something so strange.....it seems that it could have been part of a mystery movie!

- It seems it could have been feeder material or input for an old Alfred Hitchcock show.

The hand of the Lord leads Ezekiel to a valley.

- And it is full of bones.
- And Ezekiel is lead around the valley and there is row, after row, after row of bones.
- Not just bones. We are told “very dry bones.”

And the Lord asks Ezekiel, “Can these bones live?”

- Ezekiel is probably wondering, like most of us, what is this all about? What is going on?

And so Ezekiel says, “O Lord God, you know.”

- And the Lord said, “Prophecy over these bones. Say to them hear the Word of the Lord.”

So Ezekiel prophesied as he was commanded.

- And there was a sound. And rattling of bones.
- And the bones came together. And there was tendons and skin.

And now these bones form bodies.....but they have no breath.

- Then Ezekiel was told to prophesy to the breath.
- And the 4 winds came and breathed on them and they had life that they may live.
- And they were an exceedingly vast army.

Being good Lutherans, in the words of Martin Luther, “What does this mean?”

- Well, first let’s look at this in the context of Ezekiel?
- Israel, or Judah more specifically, was in captivity in Babylon.
- About 900 miles from home....at that time about a 4 months journey.

They’d lost their freedom. They’d lost their home.

- And they were depressed, helpless, hopeless, and bitter.

And now this vision is given to Ezekiel.

- What this vision is telling Ezekiel is that there is hope, there is help, there is a future, and there is joy.....in the Lord.
- There is a day to be released from captivity. To go home. To go back to the Promised Land.

How?

- With the Word of God the bones came together and there was skin on them and they stood up.
- God’s Word is active and powerful. It is performative.
- But there was no life.

And then God breathed life into them.

- Reminiscent of creation. God breathed into man the breath of life and man became a living being.
- Reminiscent for us also in the New Testament of the work of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, they heard the sound of the wind.

And breath and faith and life came into them.

- And they not only had life, they were alive. They were a vast army.
- God’s Word gave them power and strength to stand up. But then they must also walk with God. He must be a part of their life.
- With God they had strength and they had reason and purpose to live.
- They had help, hope, a future, and a reason for joy.

So again I ask YOU.....what does this mean?

- Picture yourself in Ezekiel’s shoes.
- But don’t use your imagination too far. I’m not talking Old Testament times.

- It is today, March 26, 2023. You are here in God's house, but sitting here today you are given the vision Ezekiel was.

The Spirit of the Lord has led you to this vision.

- And, in fact, the Spirit of the Lord has led you to this vision.
- You have been given this exact vision....but what does it mean for you this day?
- I will put forth that this can be broken down into 2 levels and from 2 perspectives.

Two levels.....

- For the life you now lead.....today.
- And for the life you will lead for all eternity.

And from 2 perspectives.

- You, as the person you look in the mirror and see.
- And we, together, as the body of Christ here at Hope Lutheran Church.
- I've entitled this message, "Living, Alive."

Let's start for each of us as individuals.

- The vision starts out with dead, dry bones.

Could that be you and me in our sinful condition?

- Born in sin. Lost, condemned creatures.
- And in this lost sinful condition, very much like the Children of Israel in captivity in Babylon.
- Slaves to sin, death, and the devil.

Remember they were depressed, helpless, hopeless, and bitter.

- Without Christ, without looking at life from a Christian perspective.....isn't it easy to be depressed, helpless, hopeless, and bitter?

But for us that all changed.

- And we are given the perfect visual illustration of that this morning.
- Jesse Masters came to the baptismal font here this morning.

And he, like each of us in our baptism, went into the waters of Holy Baptism.

- Drowned to old self and raised as a child of God.
- Raised from death to life.
- Those dry bones raised up as a child of God.

In Holy Baptism, each of us given.....

- Forgiveness of sins.
- Joined to Christ and brought into full communion with Him.
- Clothed in the righteousness of Christ.
- A brother or sister with Christ, a son or daughter of God our Father.
- Released from death and the devil.

And please.....it is not just Jesse this morning.....

- It is each of us as we renewed again this morning our baptismal vows.

And in our account they had bodies but no breath.

- And the breath came to them and they lived.
- In Holy Baptism, Jesse, and you and I, were anointed by the Holy Spirit who creates faith.
- And breath and faith and life came into Jesse and you and me.

And not only do we have life, we are alive.

- Goodness comes only from God.
- James chapter 1 verse 17 says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights.”

We have been joined to Christ and that makes all the difference.

- As goodness comes from Christ, if we are not connected to Him, how can we have goodness.
- We have gone from depressed, helpless, hopeless, and bitter to hopeful, helped, having a future, and a reason for joy.....in the Lord.
- Dear Christians.....do not just live, be alive in Christ.

At this point in my preparation of this sermon I thought an illustration would be appropriate.

- I didn't have one in mind but on Thursday while I was doing prison ministry I was given one.
- I asked the inmate if I could share this with our congregation and he said, of course.
- For obvious reasons I will not use names or specifics.

This young man, I am guessing him to be in his late 30's, on Thursday shared with me his story.

- He went down a wrong path and became addicted to heroin.
- The desire for heroin became very great.
- So much so, that to support his habit, he began stealing his grandma's social security checks, forging her name and using the money for heroin.

He eventually got caught and now is in jail for forgery of checks and his heroin addiction.

- To look at him physically he is now doing well.
- He has been coming to my Bible studies and I noticed he always brings his Bible with him.

He said to me he absolutely knows that he did was wrong. And he is very sorry for that and wants to try to payback for what he has done.

- Including with his grandma.
- During his time in jail, he was able to talk to her and reconciled himself to her.

Recently, while in jail, he got word that his grandma had passed away.

- He not only was informed of this but it was also shared with him what grandma had done with her estate.
- For the inmate I was with he was willed one thing.
- His grandma wanted to make sure he was given a cross she had, about a 6 to 8 inch porcelain crystal cross she always had on display in her home.
- She was very specific about this.

The inmate shared with me that his father is not a Christian and when he told the inmate about this, his father made fun of him and laughed at him.

- You could tell the inmate really treasured this cross. And he said to me it was the best thing he could get. He said it was priceless and showed to him the great wisdom of his grandma.
- He has his aunt securing the cross in safe keeping until he gets out of jail.
- He also on Thursday approached me about being baptized. I am going to begin instructing him further and in a few weeks we will have another baptism in prison.

Not just living but alive in Christ.

- Today at the end of Jesse's baptism we sang the doxology.
- It is good and proper that we did this.
- We have every reason for celebration.
- We are living and alive.

And it doesn't end there.

- Collectively as the Church at Hope, the body of Christ, the same is true.
- We, as a church, have every reason for living and being alive.

What does that look like?

- The opposite of a church depressed, helpless, hopeless, and bitter.
- The opposite of downtrodden and discouraged.
- The opposite of just going through the motions.
- The opposite of pessimism and complaining.
- The opposite of wandering aimlessly.

A church living and alive is a church.....

- With joy and enthusiasm.
- A church encouraging one another.
- A church anxious to tell others and invite them to Hope.
- A church forgiving each other's faults, understanding and growing together in Christ.
- A church with a purpose and mission God has given them.

Just as we were given a life and living at the baptismal font, we together can stand up and become living and alive as a church.....and in the words of the text.....A VAST ARMY.

Why not?

- I invite you, as Easter approaches and we rejoice in our risen Savior, to join me in renewed strength and vigor to be the church of Christ as He desires us to be.
- Even invite someone to join us for our Easter celebration.

Those dry bones.....

- And in the waters of Holy Baptism refreshed and renewed.
- Refreshed and renewed in knowing Jesus took all our sins.
- Do not forget, in His suffering as the weight of all our sins were on His shoulders, one of the 7 words from the cross was, "I thirst." Those dry bones of sin and condemnation.
- Let us go forth together in faith in and from the waters of Holy Baptism.

Remember I said we can look at our text from 2 perspectives.....the individual and the church.

- And I also said we can look at our text from 2 levels.
- The life we now lead, but also the life we will lead for all eternity.

The Children of Israel were eventually released from the captivity of Babylon to return to Israel, the Promised Land.

- There is more ahead for us than just this life here on earth.

Just as Jesse gave us a visual illustration in his baptism of what we so far have discussed.....

- So Jesus gives us a glimpse of eternal life in our Gospel reading for today.

Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus come out.”

- And the man who had been dead for 4 days came out with his hands and feet still bound with linen strips and his face still wrapped with a cloth.

In Holy Baptism you are given eternal salvation.

- “He who believes and is baptized will be saved.”

During the baptismal rite, Jesse, as was done for each of us, very early in the ceremony was given the sign of the cross both upon his forehead and upon his heart to mark him as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.

- The Book of Revelation talks about a seal on your forehead for entry into the kingdom of God.
- In Holy Baptism you also have been given that seal.
- And that makes all the difference as we live our life out now for all eternity.

That Old Testament account about the dry bones coming together, standing up, and having life.

- It is a strange account.
- It is also our account.

How we, lost and condemned, could be given so much love from God to be made His own.

- We have every reason to be living and alive as both individuals and a church.....now and for all eternity.
- Amen.

(Please stand) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

As the Apostles’ Creed was said as part of our rite of Holy Baptism, we will now continue to our prayers.