

Pentecost Sunday – Year B  
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

May 31, 2009

Ezekiel 37:1-14  
Pastor Paul Horn

“All is Not Lost!”

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. 3 He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I said, “O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.”

4 Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! 5 This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. 6 I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’”

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

11 Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ 12 Therefore prophecy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14 I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’”

Picture yourself sitting in the stadium of your favorite baseball team. But it’s the bottom of the 9th inning. This is it. Your team is down 1-9, there are two outs and it’s the end of the lineup, where you find the batters whose average is not so good. What’s the mood in the stadium? Fans are streaming to the exits. The ones who are still in their seats are chatting about anything but the game. There are of course, those handfuls of rabid fans who never seem to give up and are clapping and yelling wildly. But there’s really not much hope.

Have you ever been in a discouraging situation? Your spouse was deployed and you were left all alone with the kids, the household chores, the automobile maintenance and the finances. Your health took a turn for the worse and the doctors weren’t exactly sure

what was happening with your body. The physical condition of a family member quickly declined and there did not seem to be any way out but death. You've made some poor choices with the management of your finances and there doesn't seem to be a way out of the hole you've dug. You've tried your hardest to raise your children in the training and instruction of God's Word but they seem to be rebellious and uncontrollable. The future looks bleak. All hope appears to be lost...

What about our church? June will be the last month we receive a subsidy check from the Board for Home Missions, who have so graciously assisted us with financial support for the past 14 years. As of July 1st we will be on our own. The problem is... even with our current subsidy check of \$2,000/month, we have had to borrow money just to pay our bills the last few months. Is all hope lost for Faith Lutheran Church in Radcliff? Can we afford a new building, our pastor and our gospel outreach programs when we're barely making it now? The future looks unpromising.

That's exactly what Ezekiel was looking at in his vision: a church that had lost hope and appeared to be dead. The LORD's prophet writes, "The hand of the LORD was upon me and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones." What a sight that must have been! Can you imagine if you walked into Freeman Lake Park today in E-town and instead of seeing the water of the lake, you saw hundreds and thousands of dried up skeletons? Ezekiel probably wondered about the meaning of this special revelation. The LORD in vs11 tells Ezekiel, "These bones are the whole house of Israel." Ezekiel lived during the time of the Babylonian exile, about 580 years before Christ. The LORD sent King Nebuchadnezzar from Babylon to discipline his unfaithful people. Nebuchadnezzar knocked down all the walls of the city of Jerusalem, burned Solomon's temple to the ground and deported the majority of the people of Israel to the land between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers.

While the Israelites sat in exile, it is no wonder they said, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off." (vs11) A better translation of the Hebrew phrase our hope is gone would be our hope is destroyed, it has perished! There were no promising expectations, nothing good to look forward to in the future of their nation. Not only were they a nation that appeared to be physically dead, what is worse, they appeared to be spiritually dead; a valley full of dry bones. The people of Israel felt as if they had cut themselves off from God. "Has our rebellion forfeited God's promises? Has our sin made God's promises null and void? Would God cancel his promise of a Savior because of what we have done?" They thought, "We have as much chance of restoration as there is in marrow-less bones regaining their vitality and being surrounded once more with flesh and blood."

The problem with Israel's attitude is your problem. Your utter despair, your gloom and doom attitudes eat away at your souls, like cancer through the body, and you could be left with nothing but dry bones – souls that are dried up. Our attitude of despondency is nothing less than a failure to rely on God's promises, a failure to put our trust in him, He who is our hope for the present and the future. This is the attitude of our sinful nature and the whispering of Satan in our ear, who wish to drag us down to despair and die. The

sad reality is that we listen to them more than we listen to our good and gracious God! When we are in the deep pit of despair, sadly, we forget that God has the power to pull us up. We actually wonder if God can bring us out again...or worse yet, we think we can dig ourselves out of the hole.

Is all hope lost? Can dried up bones live again? That was the question the LORD posed to his prophet. Ezekiel responded, "O Sovereign LORD you alone know." (vs3) By his answer the prophet acknowledged that the LORD alone has the power to make the dead live again. Ezekiel was told to prophesy to the lifeless bones. Notice that in his proclamation he doesn't tell the bones to do anything. They can't. They're dead. Instead, he proclaims what the LORD would do for them. The LORD would cause breath to enter them; he would bring them back to life; he would attach tendons and flesh and skin to cover them. The LORD would do all the work. And so, in this vision, the LORD showed Ezekiel in a very visually graphic way, that he had not abandoned his promises. The people of Israel would be restored as a nation. After 70 years in exile, the LORD moved King Cyrus of Persia to send a faithful remnant home to Palestine. Most importantly, the LORD kept his promise of a Savior. 400 years after the return from exile, the LORD breathed a new life into the womb of a virgin named Mary.

Have you ever lost all hope? Are you in a discouraging situation? Do you feel as if there is no hope for the future? Before we talk about your present attitudes and your bleak outlook for the future, let me remind you that before Christ came into your life, you and I were spiritually dead. By nature, we were a pile of dried up bones. Paul says in his letter, "You were dead in your transgressions and sins." (Eph 2:1) Without Christ, dead in sin, you and I had no hope of eternity in heaven; we had neither the ability nor the desire to know God and do his will. We had no power to do anything about our conversion or establish a relationship with God. Only God could take something dead and make it live. Just as he did with Adam's lifeless clay, the Father sent his Holy Spirit to breathe life into you.

This morning you witnessed that working of the Holy Spirit in two individuals, and in Titus 3:5-7 Paul describes that work, "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." Through your Holy Baptism the Holy Spirit breathed life into your dead soul. Dried up bones have come to life! You have been born again! And through this rebirth of water and the Word you have been given the gift of faith. Faith puts its trust and hope in Christ Jesus, who allowed his bones to be dried up in death, who allowed his breath to expire, for your sins of hopelessness and despair. Faith puts its trust and hope in the resurrected Christ Jesus, whose lungs once again inhaled the cool morning air in his tomb three days later. Faith trusts that this is the same Jesus Christ who will breathe into your lifeless clay on the Last Day, and raise your dead corpse from your grave. My dear friends, all hope is not lost, no matter how depressing your situation is here on earth. You have the sure hope of forgiveness, the sure certainty of heaven. Because faith trusts in that sure hope for the future, you have hope as you live here on earth.

Faith trusts and believes that the one who breathed on his disciples and gave them the power of the Holy Spirit is the same Jesus who sends out his Holy Spirit to breathe life into your doubting hearts.

If you have a chest cold, inhaling medicine from a nebulizer may break up your congestion and help you breathe. If you suffer from asthma your doctor may prescribe an inhaler to help you breathe. After a long run down the field a football player may plop down on the bench and suck on oxygen to fill his lungs. The Holy Spirit is better than all of these. He's not just a breath of fresh air. He breathes power and hope and life into you. The Holy Spirit doesn't use medicine but the power of his Word, specifically, the Gospel found in his Word and the Sacraments.

Just as he breathed into the disciples after Jesus' ascension and gave them the power to boldly proclaim the gospel, that same Holy Spirit breathes power into you through His Word to boldly stand on God's promises. Do you feel hopeless? Allow the Holy Spirit to breathe God's Word into you, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Heb 13:5) Do you feel that there is no hope for the future? Allow the Holy Spirit to breathe upon you with Jesus' words, "Surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age." (Matt 28:20) Do you feel that your depressing situation has no happy ending? Allow the Holy Spirit the chance to breathe into you, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Rom 8:28) Do you feel that your work for the Lord is amounting to nothing? Allow his Word to breathe life into your doubting soul, "My Word will never return to me empty, but accomplish the purpose for which I sent it." (Is 55:10,11) Do you wonder about the future of our congregation? Allow the Holy Spirit to breathe his promises into you, "Be patient, and wait for the LORD." (Ps 37:7) "Trust in the LORD will all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding." (Prov 3:5) And when your doubting and hopelessness cause you to despair, stand before his altar, and allow Jesus' body and blood to revive your dying soul, "This was poured out for you, this was offered for the forgiveness of your sins." All hope is not lost...

...all hope is not lost... even if life feels like it's the bottom of the 9th, and there's two outs, and you're down 1-9, and you're next batter is 0-4. Remember that the Holy Spirit breathed into your dead soul to bring you to life, a new life in heaven, and new life here on earth. You have all hope in Christ Jesus. Put your hope in him who brought you from death to life. Amen.

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a The Hebrew for this word can also mean wind or spirit (see verses 6-14).