

Second Sunday of Easter  
04/07/2013  
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church  
Ezekiel 37:1-14  
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I bring you grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word of God for our consideration this morning is from the Old Testament book of Ezekiel 37<sup>th</sup> chapter.

Christ is risen! Amen.

A short while ago you prayed in the collect, “Almighty God, grant that we who have celebrated the Lord’s resurrection may by Your grace confess in our life and conversation that Jesus is Lord and God.” There we prayed that all we say and do in this life might reflect the idea that Jesus Christ, who is both God and man came to this earth and rectified the problem of our sin. We’re to live out our life as though it’s true that we’re forgiven, rescued from hell, and that God is pleased with us because of Christ’s death and resurrection. This should be evidenced by a life lived seeking to do God’s will and proclaiming Christ to the world in response to this great love shown to us.

A similar attitude should have been evidenced by the Israelites who were exiled in Babylon. We cut them slack I suppose since they were in exile. No one wants to be exiled from their home country. No one wants to be taken captive by an enemy nation. Even if the fault lay with Israel and it did, they’d been disobedient to God and for that cause God allowed them to go into exile. Still you have to understand why they didn’t exhibit the right kind of attitude.

While Israel didn't know "Jesus", they did know the Savior who was promised to come. This was the covenant that God made with Abraham, Moses, David and on down the line. Israel was God's people and from God's people a Savior would emerge. Isaiah said about this Savior, "*Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*"

Isaiah wrote those words over 750 years before Israel went into exile. Those words were part of the Scripture of Israel. Israel had the promise of God. But they didn't act like it. Their life and their words didn't reflect that they were the chosen people of God. They didn't reflect a nation from whom the Savior of the world would spring. Before their exile and during their exile and even shortly after their exile they acted as though they had nothing to be thankful for as though God forgot them.

Even back then humans loved glory theology rather than what we now call the theology of the cross. The theology of glory seeks after those things that appeal to man's appetites and emotions. The theology of the cross seeks after those things God promised will save us. So when things look bleak theology of glory seekers lose hope. "Things are not well, God must have forgotten us", they reason. But the adherents to the theology of the cross or theology of suffering

note that if God promised deliverance and salvation no matter how bad things look God must be true to His Word.

Ezekiel looks out in a vision over the valley of dry bones. We find out that these dry bones represent Israel. They show the hopelessness of that nation as she suffered through exile. As a people they'd given up hope in ever returning to Israel or being redeemed. They still had the promises of God but they couldn't see any hope. God's Word must not be true. As the Psalmist says, "Those who don't believe God's Word make Him out to be a liar." So Ezekiel looks out on those bleached bones and is asked. "*Son of man, can these bones live?*"

Ezekiel's response sounds like something out of Revelation, "*O Lord God, you know.*" His response is very similar to John's when he is asked who the myriad of people are who stand before the throne of God, "*Sir, you know.*" And indeed God and His hosts do know the answers to these questions. Can the dry bleached, bones live? In other words, can Israel be resurrected? Can Israel be redeemed?

In the Gospel lesson for today Thomas was wondering whether some particular bones, those of Jesus could live. But the real question before him was whether or not his ole sinful bones could be made to live again. He was caught up in the theology of glory too. Everything was great as long as Jesus was walking and talking to him. But once He died, well, that Son of Man must be crucified and rise again stuff went out the window. Dead men don't come alive again. The dead stay dead. "Could the bones of Jesus really live?", Thomas thought. Could Thomas once again have faith in a living Christ?

Humans today, humans here this morning doubt, lose hope, and despair over their situation in live. We know we're the baptized. We know we're the elect of God. We know that heaven is the promised reward to us for the sake of Christ and His works. But there's no doubt that we all...doubt. It doesn't really take much to cast us out of a comfortable place. Life is short. The troubles and trials are many, yet all in all life here is short. Yet many times you'd think that whatever problem we're having now is going to be a problem that sticks with us for eternity. Not in heaven it won't. Problems end when Christ beckons us home. Sin and trouble don't transfer from here to eternity. Heaven is without sin and all its related problems.

But like Israel and like Thomas when things don't go like we think they ought to we think God has dropped the hammer or maybe worse He's forgotten us. We're no longer His people. In our despair we need to ask Ezekiel's question can these bones live? Can they be redeemed? Before we answer that and before we answer Ezekiel's question let's answer Thomas' question. Can the bones of Jesus live?

You've got the answer, right? Christ is risen...Amen. Jesus didn't decay, His bones weren't bleached. Now, to be sure His body died. It'd had to in order for us to be saved but it didn't decay or see corruption. Then Jesus arose as we heard last week. The promise from the resurrection of Christ is that we too will be raised. The death of this body isn't the death of this person. We will live on in heaven immediately at our death and in the future God will "re-combine" our body and soul and that's how we will be in eternity. That's the promise of Easter. But

don't think that's the only promise. The forgiveness of Good Friday and the resurrection of Easter is for now as well.

Did God raise Jesus from the dead in time? Did God raise up new believers in Israel while they were in exile? Did God raise up again the faith of Thomas? Has God not restored your faith, raised it up again, in this life? Have you not doubted the Word of God only to be brought back to life and salvation? And how has this happened? How did the bones in the valley rise? How was Israel restored? How did Thomas finally believe?

Brothers and sisters in Christ I submit to you that in every instance it was the Word of God that revived those bones. God told Ezekiel to prophesy, that is to speak the Word, and he did it. Ezekiel in the vision did prophesy and the bones received the Word and were enlivened again. The Word of God made the dead live. Only the Word of God raises the dead to life. The nation of Israel did return to God, the temple was built and the Savior of the world was born in their midst. And all this happened because the Word of God was proclaimed to them and they heard it.

True enough Thomas had to see Jesus, but Thomas was seeing the Word of God in the flesh, as Jesus Christ is the Word of God. In response Jesus doesn't say "Blessed are those who see Me and believe" although they were blessed to see Him. No, He says, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" And later Paul writes, "*How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And*

*how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."*

Already God has performed the miracle of resurrection in you. True, we await the resurrection of our bodies in heaven at Christ's coming. But that would not happen if it weren't true that God raised your soul from the dead here in time.

God did not abandon you to doubt. He didn't and won't leave you alone in your despair and anguish. Christ died that you might be set free from the penalty of your sin here in time. Christ died that you might believe in Him despite a world that doesn't want you to. Christ died that here on earth the devil might have no power over you. And then Christ gave you His Word borne along by the Holy Spirit. He gave you that Word that you might hear it and live. And live you do because you've heard and not seen.

God continues to be faithful. It's enough that He allows us to hear the Word. But God knows the temptations of this world, the devil and our own flesh and so He abundantly provides His Word. We have it here in preaching. We have it here in the waters of baptism, we have it here in the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper and so we live. We the forgiven and the enlivened people of God live here in time and we will live too there in eternity. Can these bones live? Not only can they, but they do!

And so that we might continue to live as the people of God and so that the world might live to by hearing the Word from us we pray, "Almighty God, grant

that we who have celebrated the Lord's resurrection may by Your grace confess  
in our life and conversation that Jesus is Lord and God." Amen. Christ is risen...  
Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.