

ST. LUKE EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH

SERMON BY PASTOR ANTHONY E. SCHULTZ
MAY 27, 2012 **EZEKIEL 37:1-14** PENTECOST



37 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. ²He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, *there were* very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, *they were* very dry. ³He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know." ⁴Again He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.'" ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. ⁶I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.'" ⁷So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹Then He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.'"'" ¹⁰So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. ¹¹Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.'" ¹²Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. ¹⁴I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD.'"

Faith – soul saving faith is love and trust and confidence in the Gospel promises of God! We were driving to Chicago the other day when we saw a Porsche – a pretty sweet ride. As we pulled away from a stop light – and went faster and faster – a spoiler – an aerodynamic kind of fin popped out from just below the Porsche’s rear window. Do you know why? It’s called a spoiler – a piece that directs the wind coming over the top of the car that literally physically pushes the back of the car down. It makes the back wheels grip much more. Remember the old commercial? The Porsche pulls very slowly up to a semi-trailer. The roof catches on the edge. Back the Porsche up about a quarter-mile. Drive it – really fast – directly at the semi-trailer – faster and faster. You cringe as you expect the top to be sheared off – but it slides neatly – safely under and through! Now that is a leap of faith – trust and confidence that the car will hug the road! We have much more than that! We have supreme confidence and child-like trust that Jesus has taken away all our sins. We have supreme confidence and child-like trust that Heaven is our forever home! We have that confidence and trust because we have the Holy Spirit. That’s what we celebrate today – the gift of the Holy Spirit for Jesus’ sake. Today God’s Word reminds us:

See The Power of the Spirit!

1. Look at all the dry bones~
2. See the Spirit give life and hope –

The part of God’s Word we are concentrating on – from the scroll of the Prophet Ezekiel! When you hear the name Ezekiel what comes to mind? Do you remember the children of Israel carried off into captivity in Babylon? Do you remember that Ezekiel was a Priest? You

had to be born to the priesthood-descended from Aaron and able to prove it. People who lived back in Old Testament times were very careful to keep meticulous records of their family trees. To be born into the priesthood was part of the job requirement. If you were injured in a terrible accident or were born with special needs – that might make it impossible for you to serve. You needed to be whole and well and strong – in order to do the literal heavy lifting required to offer sacrifices. You had to be whole and well and strong to offer the sides and quarters of beef – the lambs and goats that were part of the whole burnt offerings, the sin offerings and guilt offerings and fellowship offerings – the thank-offerings that God’s people brought to the Temple. Here in the most graphic and powerful ways – God’s people understood **the wages of sin is death and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness**. 597 years before the birth of the Christ-child the LORD called Ezekiel – “**son of man**” – Ezekiel to preach law and gospel to God’s people in exile in Babylon. Ezekiel was directed to teach object lessons. He was tied up in his own house – unable to go out among the people. The LORD made his tongue stick to the roof of his mouth – so he couldn’t rebuke the people. Then when the time was right – he called the people to repentance. The LORD directed him to take a clay tablet – and draw on it the city of Jerusalem. Then he made little siege works – like the little green soldiers in Toy Story. Then he used an iron skillet to show the LORD’s protection! Ezekiel was to bake bread over a fire made of human waste! Ezekiel said, “That’s just too gross!” So the LORD said – bake bread over a fire made from a cow flop! And when the people say that’s so gross – you tell them – you think that’s disgusting? Think how disgusting your sins are? How graphic Ezekiel’s object lessons – made powerful in the hearts and minds of God’s people by the Holy Spirit!

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. ²He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry. Dead – **dead in transgressions and sin** is by nature how we are! When you drive through Chicago – downtown – you will notice that people are very careful when approaching intersections. If the light turns yellow – they stop. You don’t see people rolling through the intersection on yellow and even red! If you do – especially at night – you will notice a flash! That flash is a camera taking your picture – and a picture of your license plate. In a few days you will receive a ticket for \$75! There are in the neighborhood of 1,300 such tickets each year. That’s a lot! Just imagine if every time you did a sin – there would be a flash – a photograph of you doing something painful or hurtful or wrong! Would we walk around with a constant flashing – again and again – saying the wrong thing – thinking the wrong thing – doing the wrong thing! The Apostle Paul wrote, **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst!”** The closer we get to Jesus – surely the more we will be under attack! The older you get – the fewer days left for the devil to try and crash you into hell – the more desperate he will become – the more underhanded his attacks will get! On our own and by our self we are surely doomed. Jesus’ grace and mercy and forgiveness are our only hope. Only Jesus can take us from death to life!

The Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. ²He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry. Bones – lots and lots of dead dry bones. That’s us! If you go downtown Chicago – around Grant Park – you will see homeless people – street people – bag ladies. You see literal beggars. They have pieces of cardboard – not white poster board – but torn from an old brown box. Written on this cardboard with a black crayon – are words that plead for pity and for help. Some beggars look at you – try to catch

your eye – as they shake their big plastic cup with a few coins in the bottom. More and more of them, though, don't even look at you. They look down as if embarrassed or ashamed. They look down at the cold hard sidewalk for hours at a time. Past them walk people with jobs – wearing nice, fancy even expensive shoes – their ear buds playing music – their smart phones in their hands – the stores that sell designer clothes – the hotels where Oprah Winfrey's guests used to stay. Expensive cars and cabs driving down Lakeshore Drive! Would you throw pocket change into the cup of one of these beggars? Would you show compassion for someone wearing a hijab – a Muslim head dress? We are spiritual paupers – spiritual street people – filthy in our sins and failures – our malicious hurtful mistakes! Jesus took all that guilt away. There is beside the lake – a huge bean – a sculpture shaped like a *ginormous* coffee bean – as wide as several school buses – and some three stories high. If you walk up to it – you see all kinds of finger prints and smudges. But back up – just a little bit – and all you see is the shine – the bright and beautiful reflection of whatever is near! Look closely at your day to day life and our fingerprints are all over our high crimes and misdemeanors! Jesus washed them all away – so when our Heavenly Father looks at us – he sees only His Son – our Redeemer – the one who cleansed us from all unrighteousness!

“Can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, You know.”⁴ Again He said to me, “Prophesy over these bones and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.’⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, ‘Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. ⁶I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.’”⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling... The Hebrew word for rattling is a wonderful word. The rattling sound is like the buzzing of a whole swarm of bees – it's like a whole bunch of horses thundering into battle – it's the sound of chariots – of swords and shields crashing together – the sound of battle! The bones crashed together – stuck together and were covered with muscles and skin. And then comes the most miraculous part. **¹⁴I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life...** If you go to the Shedd Aquarium – they have a snapping turtle – a huge snapping turtle. His shell is the size of the proverbial garbage can lid. It is grey and lumpy and literally covered with this green grass moss growing on it. It has a head that's all encrusted – the eyes are all covered with this crust. The legs have these huge claws. The mouth hangs open. The whole turtle is kind of leaning on this underwater driftwood. It just hangs there – hung up under water. Children and parents come and look and stare and announce it's dead! I'm sure it's dead! And then – all of a sudden it moves – the mouth clamps shut. The eyes open – the legs and the tail all move and the children scream! It's not dead! It's very much alive! And the little fish that was swimming inside the turtle's mouth – gulp! – is gone! Everyone was wrong. Sometimes people do that with people. They judge them. They look at them and decide what they can see on the outside must be what's going on in the inside! And that's wrong! We can't see into other people's hearts! We are not called to judge thoughts – not to judge motives – not to judge our neighbor. It's not for us to be saw dust inspectors. It is for us to see the plank – the rotten barn board in our own eye. We need to grow in faith. We need to take our neighbor's words and actions in the kindest possible – the kindest possible light! We need to thank Jesus for being merciful to one another.

¹⁴I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it,” declares the LORD.” We were in Chicago Tuesday night for the 50th reunion of the Beach Boys! I have only

been to a few rock'n roll concerts but this one was wonderful! The concert began with the drummer drumming like a mad man. Beside him was a percussionist that pounded on cymbals, tambourines, wood blocks and cow bells and anything else he could hit! There were 4 different keyboards and electric and acoustic guitars – 7 singers in the front and 7 in the back. There were lights built into the floor and everywhere above – a huge screen with pictures of the Pacific Ocean – surfers and muscle cars! The music started and instantly literally thousands of people leaped to their feet – dancing – clapping – singing – cheering. There was a contagious joy and happiness you don't usually feel on your average Tuesday! It was pretty amazing. It lasted for a couple of hours – with a brief intermission to sell T-shirts and baseball caps – Beach Boys things and stuff. I think the Chicago Theatre was one of the happiest places I have ever been in – for a couple of hours. But even there – there was sadness. Mike Love said into every life comes tragedy and the Beach Boys knew about that. They showed video of two of the Beach Boys who had died – showed them singing songs they loved – and for a few minutes – even though they were singing you realized – people no matter how rich or famous or gifted – die, too! One day we will die, too! Because Jesus died and rose again – we will hear angels sing. As beautiful as Tuesday was by Lakeshore Drive – in Grant Park – in downtown of the Windy City – it will be far more wonderful in Heaven. We will be in Heaven – where everything is flawless because Jesus died and rose again to forgive us. We will be in Heaven – because Jesus has given us his Holy Spirit. We have faith because bones as dry and dead as ours can live – by the power of the Gospel! Amen!

To God alone all glory!

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