

SERMON FOR SUNDAY, MARCH 9, 2008

Lessons: Ezekiel 37: 1-14 The Dry Bones Romans 8:1-11 The Spirit of Life John 11: 17-27, 38-53 Resurrection of Lazarus

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

Intro. Europe has some of the most beautiful cathedrals in the world, soaring majestic architecture, dazzling stained glass windows, inspiring statuary. Simply awe inspiring! I've been privileged to see and tour many of these magnificent buildings: St. Pauls and Westminster, London, Notre Dame, Paris; St. Marcus, Venice; Kulk Cathedral of Germany; Frau Kirke of Wittenberg; Kaiser Wilhelm of Berlin, Milan Cathedral of Italy and others, each and everyone of them majestic.

Underneath these magnificent cathedrals are burial crypts or burial vaults of kings and queens, of princes and princesses, the famous and the infamous. Beyond these crypts far under some of these cathedrals in endless tunnels are 1,000's and 1,000's of bones and skulls of ordinary people stacked from floor to ceiling as far back as you can see in many cases. As a pre Seminary student in the 1970's I was allowed into the crypts and burial tunnels beneath St. Peter's Basilica of Rome, the Pope's cathedral. I saw the grave of the Apostle Peter, a lot of Popes and the bones of many, many ordinary priests and nuns. All waiting for the Resurrection of the dead at Jesus' 2nd Coming. In our Christian creeds we confess we believe in 'the resurrection of the body', the resurrection of flesh and bones. BUT, how can dead bones live? Impossible! Whether they're buried under the great cathedrals of Europe or whether they're buried in the local cemetery of Plainview, Mn. How can dead bones live? Impossible? Or is it? The Prophet Ezekiel was given a vision of a valley of dry bones in which the Lord shows us exactly how dead bones are raised to life. Whether that is the dry bones of your physical life today or whether that is the dead bones of your buried body from the grave. How the impossible becomes possible.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD BREATHES LIFE INTO THOSE DRY BONES!

And that is what I want to talk to you about a little bit this week end in anticipation of what Easter is all about. Where our Lenten journey is leading us: **THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY!**

I. The immediate context of Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones is the Babylonian Captivity of God's people. It was a time of international upheaval in social mores and economics and religion and politics. Not unlike the upheaval we are experiencing today in our American society and global world. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, present day Iraq, has taken 1,000's of Jews including Ezekiel into captivity. He put into power a puppet king, King Zedekiah, to rule in Jerusalem. But, Zedekiah rebels against Nebuchadnezzar. So the armies of Babylon laid siege upon Jerusalem starving the people. In July of 586 BC Nebuchadnezzar's army breaches Jerusalem's walls, plunders the city, killing and raping the remnant of Jerusalem's population. On Aug. 14, 586 the city and temple of Jerusalem which ironically means Jeru = place and salem = peace, the place of peace is burned to the ground, left desolate, dry, dead, dust and ashes. That's the situation of the dry bones of Ezekiel 37, an impossible situation.

In Ezekiel 36, the chapter just prior to our lesson for today, Ezekiel tells us why God would allow this awful Babylonian Captivity of the 'whole house of Israel', this devastation of His own people.

"This is what the Sovereign Lord says 'when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they defiled it by their conduct and their actions. Their conduct was like a woman's monthly uncleanness in My sight ... so I poured out My wrath on them ... I dispersed them among the nations ... I judged them according to their conduct and actions ... for they profaned My holy name'. The disobedience of God's people brought upon them both physical and spiritual death, consequences of sin. They were the dry bones of Ezekiel's vision.

But, Ezekiel 36, the chapter prior to our lesson also includes promises and hope for God's dried up captive people.

"I will show you the holiness of my great name' says the Sovereign Lord 'I will bring you back into your own land ... I will cleanse you from your impurities and give you a new heart ... I will put My Spirit in you and you will live in the land of Israel once again ... you will be My people and I will be your God".

That's the context and the situation of Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones, the impossible becoming possible. It's illustrating the dried up unfaithfulness of God's people and the life giving faithfulness upon God's people by God's grace, breathed upon them by God's prophets!

II. Well, by our human nature you and I are under sin's captivity. Our sins of thoughts and words and actions have exiled us from God, separated us from God. They hold us captive in a guilty conscience, of regrets and if onlys. Our sins hold us captive in the fear of condemnation of death and the grave. We know we are going to die and dry up. We're captive in the original sin of Adam and Eve. We're sinful = full of sin by nature and held captive in that sinful condition. You see we're the 'whole house of Israel', God's New Israel, His Church. By our words and by our conduct the very name of God we received from Him as a gift in Holy Baptism becomes profaned. We are dried up. Our disobedience and profanity of God's name even as His chosen people brings spiritual and physical death upon us. Just like His Old Testament Israel our disobedience to God's Word, His name, brings upheaval in our world today also; social mores, economics, religion, politics and one day our physical dry bones and bodies in the grave.

But, it is God who remains gracious to us sinners, to us who so often profane Him or one another. God remains faithful to us captive exiles who are so often unfaithful to Him. And that gracious faithfulness of God is in the flesh and bone of Jesus Christ. God becomes incarnate. God steps into our valley of dry bones, our lives. God in Jesus Christ is crucified on a dry bone cross in our place. God who is eternal and can never die, does the impossible, God dies in our place and is buried as dead bones in the grave the deepest of dry bone valleys, for us.

Luke 18 'What is impossible with man is possible with God'.

Jesus, our faithful and gracious God, our substitute cries out in our dryness on that dead dry tree of the cross, **John 19:**

"I am thirsty! A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of hyssop plant and lifted it to Jesus' dried lips. When Jesus had received the drink He said: IT IS FINISHED! With that He bowed His head and gave up His Spirit", dried, dead bones buried! God doing the impossible for us! And the result:

Romans 8 "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus". It's through Jesus as our Savior that we are spiritually restored. Having lived for us, having died for us on the dry stick of a cross. Jesus also rises from the dead for us, ascends into heaven pleading for us from God's throne of mercy He sends His Holy Spirit upon us! As His Word is breathed upon us, the impossible becomes possible for us. Like right now through the preaching and teaching of God's Word, through the prophets and prophetesses of your Pastors and Teachers. Just like Ezekiel prophecys the breath, the Spirit of God upon that valley of dry bones doing the impossible. The Holy Spirit of God is breathed upon us dead, exiled, captive sinners. The breath of God is breathed upon us through the water and Word of Holy Baptism. The very name of God we are guilty of profaning, is the name of God which we invoke with confidence. The breath of God is breathed into the bread and wine of Holy Communion in the Word's of Jesus' institution for the forgiveness of our sins. The impossible becoming possible for us through the breath of God's Spirit.

Romans 8 "You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you"

We're spiritually restored day by day by the grace of God's breath by means of God's Word and Sacraments. Our dry bones are made alive in the Spirit of God, the impossible becomes possible in us. We dead sinners are alive in Jesus!

Romans 8 'If Christ is in you although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness'. We are spiritually raised day by day to new life, abundant life, meaningful life, daily life filled with all kinds of possibilities for living.

Philippians 4 'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! ... all things are possible through Him who gives me strength'. The Spirit of God of Jesus raises our spirits, our souls, our faith to all the possibilities of life.

And, the impossible isn't done yet. We also will be physically raised from the dead by the power of God's Word. Like Lazarus, **John 11: 'Jesus cried out with a loud voice 'Lazarus come out'. The man who had died came out ... Jesus said 'unbind him and let him go'.** Do you think Lazarus lived his life to the very fullest after that resurrection? You better believe he did!

III. How do dry bones come alive? Impossible? Whether they're in the valley of dry bones of Babylonian Captivity, or in the dried up captivity and exile of our sins, or in the vaults and crypts and tunnels beneath Europe's magnificent cathedrals, or in the cemetery of Plainview, Mn. or in the seats of Immanuel Lutheran right now? How do dry bones come alive? By the authority and the power of God's Word preached and taught and announced through Pastors and Teachers and your Christian witness in peoples dry bone lives and received in the Spirit breathed visible Word of Baptism and Communion the impossible becomes possible.

Ezekiel 37 'Thus says the Lord God 'I will open your graves and raise you from your graves ... and you shall know that I am the Lord ... I will put My Spirit within you and you shall live. I have spoken and I will do it. Declares the Lord'

Conclusion

A couple of weeks ago, Sharon and I were visiting her Mom and Dad, Marge and Orville. Marge wanted to go through some old pictures with Sharon. One of those pictures was of Sharon's Great Aunt and Uncle, Margaret and Fred Bartels. Aunt Margaret and Uncle Fred will be Sharon and my **'RESURRECTION PARTNERS'** on Resurrection Day. A couple of years ago Sharon and I made arrangements with Immanuel Lutheran, Hay Creek's Cemetery Board to receive grave plots next to Margaret's and Fred's graves. They had no children and the extended family suggested Sharon and I use these grave plots. Sharon and my dead dry bones will be buried someday in that plot. As the consequences of our sins against God and against you we'll die and dry up. We're ready and looking forward to that day when we are buried in that plot next to Fred and Margaret. Because we believe the impossible as the Apostle Paul says in Philippians 1 **'For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain'.** As the consequence of Jesus Christ as our Savior and by the power of His Word you will see us again in the resurrection of the body.

Romans 8 'If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you'.

What an awesome and wonderful day that will be, Resurrection Day, the day of impossibilities totally possible!

Ezekiel 37 'As I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them and flesh had come upon them and skin had covered them ... so I prophesied and the breathe came into them and they lived' That's how dry bones come alive! That's how the impossible becomes possible, through the power and the authority of God's Word:

**God breathes and 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins!'
God breathes and 'I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins!'
God breathes and 'I look for the resurrection of the body
and the life of the world to come,
LIFE EVERLASTING!' Amen**

And know may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds through faith alone in Jesus Christ our Lord,

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE! Amen