Text: Ezekiel 37:1-14

**Text**

The Ezekiel passage is probably one of the most famous in all of scripture. And its famous because of how it plays on the heart.

The picture that it paints is one of complete devastation. “The hand of the Lord was on me and He brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the middle of the valley. It was full of bones.” Not dead bodies or even skeletons of identifiable individuals. Just random bones. “And there were many of them, and they were very dry.” Whatever caused the vision happened a long time ago. The carcasses have been picked clean. The wind has dried them completely.

Within the context of the vision this field of bones in the House of Israel at the end of the Monarchy, at the start of the Exile. The entire sweep of the history of Israel appears to be over. And this is what it comes to – a field of dry bones. The Patriarchs and the promises, the law and the prophets, David and Solomon and the Temple Worship. Very Dry Bones. Unidentifiable.

But why it plays on the heart is not because of the story of Israel, however powerful that might be. Why it plays on the heart is what it might say about us. If the chosen people of God can come to dry bones, we certainly can. And it is not like the signs aren’t there. There are of course the safe things to talk about, the things that don’t really touch us. Like how large portions of the church have abandoned the truth for lies. But that doesn’t really touch us because we either take pride that we haven’t, or we don’t think doctrine really matters. We can talk about the ways that the unity of the church has been broken down. But we guard our hearts on that one by focusing on large impossible things – schisms rent asunder and heresies distressed – instead of focusing on the ways that we rip apart unity, like no longer remembering the Sabbath day and keeping it holy with our brothers and sisters. But then you start to get to the things that do cut the heart. The absence of our family which often hardens hearts toward others that are present and the mission that is at our door. The lack of zeal such that we can barely keep ourselves evangelized. The fear not of the LORD but of men and what the next 5 years might do. Behold, they say “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost, we are clean cut off.” Our English translations bury some of the power of that lament as it bulldozed the chant structure.

Dried up – our bones…We ourselves have no strength.

Perished – our hope…The future generation have been carted away into exile in Babylon, or Egypt or Sodom or

Cut off – we ourselves…the prophets are silent, the temple is fallen, the kings are no more

And what does God do? He makes us look at it. He brought me out in the Spirit. And He has the nerve to ask, “Son of Man, can these bones live?”

Ezekiel’s answer better be our answer. We better not jump to an easy triumphalism. Oh, the gates of hell will never prevail. True, Satan has been judged. But Israel can be reduced to a remnant, so can the church. It has happened before. But neither are we without any answer. Staring at a field of bones does not give us the right of despair. We are dust and to dust we shall return, but it was from dust that the LORD formed us. And the Lord breathed into that dust and we lived. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. “Son of Man, can these bones live?”…”O LORD God, you know.”

God, what is your intent? Are we to be a byword among the nations. A laughing stock. Look at what faith in the God of Israel produces – dry bones. Or you going to forever withhold you Word and Spirit? Or will you breathe out as you did of old? God, you’ve brought us here, what is your intent, you know. Whatever it is, the judgements of the LORD are righteous and just altogether. But speak, let us know.

**Christology**

And God said prophesy. Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones hear the word of the Lord.

Now I want you to pause for a second to consider the ridiculousness of this command. There are no ears on these bones. Yet the Word of the Lord comes and is heard. Prophesy to these bones, behold I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you. Notice that the proclamation is one of promise. I the LORD will do this. When you Israel are so dead that you are nothing but a valley of dry bones, I will do this. You are right, you bones are dried up, and your hope has perished, and you have cut yourselves off. But the LORD will do this. And you shall live. And when you do you shall know – This is the Work of the LORD.

It comes to us as proclamation, as promise. It asks not for strength, but faith. The LORD has promised, and he keeps his promises.

“So I prophesied as I was commanded.” This is always the first step. Faith comes by hearing. Proclaim the word. While you were a pile of dry bones, dead in your sins, Christ came for you and spoke over you. Father, forgive them. Christ speaks over you in the words of the sacrament giving you his very body and blood. And behold a rattling, and the bones came together…and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them. The body of Christ assembled with his own flesh. Come together at the Word.

But there was still a problem. “There was no breath in them.” Maybe we know the letter. Maybe we know the things that put together a good club. You can have all the flesh, but without the breath, without the Spirit it does nothing. Prophesy to the breath, say to the breath, thus says the LORD...come that they might live.” And it is the Spirit that gives life. The Spirit spoken into you at your baptism. The Spirit that pronounces the absolution. The Spirit the preaches the Word. The body of Christ has been given the Spirit to live. To stand on its feet, an exceedingly great army.

Can these bones live? God’s resounding answer is yes. They do live.

**Eschatological**

“Can these bones live?”

I have no answer of my own. I’ve only been sent to prophesy. Today, here and now, the prophecy is the promise. God sent his only Son for you. This Jesus could raise Lazarus, after he had been I the tomb for four days. He’s the God who granted Sarah a child when she was 99. This Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He works by death and resurrection. Whoever believes in me though he die yet shall he live. This is God’s promise to you.

Do I know if this particular field of bones shall live? Depends upon if they hear the promise. And we do not harden our hearts to its call.

But it is not because God has withheld his Word. Because the promise of God has been fulfilled in Christ and given to you in Word and Sacrament.

“Can these bones live?”

Tomorrow, that promise becomes the surety. “You shall know I am the LORD when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves…and I will put my Spirit within you.” Today we have the downpayment of that spirit. Tomorrow, its fullness. Today we see the promised land like Abraham, by faith, from afar. Tomorrow, “I will place you in your own land.” Today, God has given us flesh, and restored our hope and reconnected us to the great cloud of witnesses. Tomorrow, “we shall know.” Today, we daily die and rise. Tomorrow we enter eternal life. Today we struggle, tomorrow the victory.

For the LORD has spoke, and I will do it, declares the LORD. And God keeps his promises.

“Can these bones live?”

The already do. Amen