

Sermon for: Trinity Lutheran Church, Manilla

Sermon Text: Ezekiel 37:1-11 (Old Testament Lesson); Pentecost—May 18, 2024

Sermon Title/Theme: Where Do You Go When Things Get Dry?

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

“My throat is dry. Can I have a glass of water?” “It sure is dry; I wish it would rain.” There are a variety of conditions and situations where we find “dry” being in a topic of conversations. “Dry” is key to the divine conversation between Prophet Ezekiel and the people of Israel held captive in Babylon: “O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord,” (Ezekiel 37:4). The Spirit of God breathes life into the dry bones in Ezekiel’s vision. The Spirit of God breathes life into our spiritual droughts.

Where do we go when life seems to dry up? What is our response to an emotional drought when relationships dry up? The heart seems to dry up when we face illness, crises, or death. What about the spiritual droughts? When lives aren’t watered with the Word, the soul seems to dry up.

Things were really dry in Israel. It was more than lack of moisture in the desert land of Babylon. It was a spiritual drought. Again and again God’s people had resisted and rejected Him. When God admonished them with His law, they would repent and change for a time, but their repentance had not been sincere or long-lasting. Finally God had had enough, and He let them fall into the hands of their enemies, the Babylonians. This great army of the Middle East had poured over the land, overpowered Israel, and taken them into exile. This once proud nation, this nation of promise, was reduced to a band of homeless and helpless prisoners in a dry land.

Ezekiel is sent by God to be His messenger to the people in exile. God gives Ezekiel a unique vision. Ezekiel finds himself in the middle of a valley—a valley of dry bones. God tells Ezekiel

the application of the vision: *"Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. . . Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost."* (vs. 11)

But God brings life to the bones. At Ezekiel's declaration, *"O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord,"* the bones come of life and they are attached to each other, flesh comes on the bones, and skin covers them and breath fills the body. God gives a message of life not only visually through the bones but gives a promise to Israel: *"I will put my breath in you, and you shall live."* (vs. 6)

Ezekiel as a prophet of promise is God's voice to share that life would come again in the Promised Messiah. The church journeys through the dry season of Lent and Jesus' passion as we ultimately see the bones of Jesus stretched and strained under the weight of the cross, wrapped in burial cloths, and hidden in a tomb. During the Easter season of the last seven weeks, we have celebrated again that Jesus' bones lived. The resurrected body of Jesus took in breath on Easter Sunday morning. The promise made to Mary and Martha (Gospel Lesson) "I am the Resurrection and the Life" was fulfilled. Jesus was resurrected so that He might bring life—eternal life—to the world. The life He gives becomes ours through the Spirit.

"I will put my breath (Spirit) in you, and you shall live," was more than a promise to Ezekiel and Israel. It was a promise to all God's people who through the Spirit witnessed and believed in the Resurrection and the Life. Disciples, whose hope was dried up, received the Spirit of life on Pentecost. The church took on life and spread through the world. Whenever things got dry again, they went to the life-giving Word.

Where do we go when things get dry? *"O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord."* (vs. 4) The reality of our sinful world and our sinful condition is that life gets dry. The winds of life change and we find ourselves in extreme life droughts, and we need a season of spiritual moisture. Other

times we find ourselves just needing a gentle refreshing rain. “Hear the word of the Lord.” It was the “word of the Lord” that brought life to the exiles and brings life to us. What a privilege it is (what a necessity it is) to gather in God’s house week after week, season after season, to hear the word of forgiveness and hope. What a blessing it is to gather weekly to hear the Word of a Savior who suffered and died for us and a Savior who is alive again so that He can bring life.

God chooses to bring that word to us through the waters of Baptism. What a miracle that God chooses to use water, a substance which brings and maintains physical life, as His means to bring spiritual life. When little Ellie is physically thirsty, a loving family quickly attends to her needs. As parents and sponsors you have today attended to her spiritual thirst. Through the water and the word she has received “new life” in Baptism.

God chooses to bring His word to us through the bread and wine of the Sacrament of the Altar. As water refreshes dry lips, so the body and blood of Jesus refreshes spiritually dry lives. Often as we leave the Lord’s Table we hear the words of dismissal, “May this true body and blood of our Lord and Savior strengthen and preserve you (and we might add refresh) you to life everlasting.” The life that was “dry” has been nourished again!

Disaster strikes leaving us overwhelmed and we ask, “Can these bones live?”

A loved one dies and we are sad and lonely. “Can these bones live?”

A family member or friends begins to drink more than can be managed or seeks other means of coping that jeopardize the business, marriage, and family: “Can these bones live?”

A child succumbs to curiosity or peer pressure and begins to pursue a lifestyle that alienates family and friends: “Can these bones live?”

The message through Ezekiel to God's people of long ago and today is, "The Savior lives; the Spirit of life has descended; the Word continues to work. Yes, these bones live!"

This weekend many families in our community (including the Segebart family) are rejoicing in the graduation of their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. It's a refreshing time. However, we all know from experience there will be "dry times" of doubt and disappointment: "Our bones are dried up, and our hopes is lost; we are clean cut off." We continue to live as sinners in a sinful world.

No matter if your bones are scattered about by seasons of spiritual drought, or if your muscles are just beginning to cramp because you haven't been drinking enough of God's watering Word, the Spirit comes to us again today with God's promise, "*I will put my breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord. . . . Then you will know that I am the Lord; I have spoken and I will do it,*" (vs 14). God raises all sinners to life through the power of the Gospel. These bones can and will live.

Sometimes even churches and ministries seem like the field of dry bones. The journey with Pastor Johnson and Tiffany during the last stages of his illness was a dry time. The months following Pastor Johnson's death were (and sometimes still are) dry times. In the century plus history of this congregation there have been other times where there were "dry" bones. However the Spirit brings and breathes life into the church. As we anticipate the ministry of Pastor Staehr later this summer, we have the promise of the Spirit that as he and you gather around that word, bring your children to the baptismal font, and gather at the Lord's Table, there is life!

Where do we go when things get dry? It's not where you go, but where the Savior has gone and where the Spirit continues to take us today. The Spirit spoke through Ezekiel, "I will put my

Spirit within you and you shall live; you shall know that I am the Lord.” The Spirit spoke through the Son of Man who stood at Lazarus’ grave and commanded “Lazarus, come forth” and he did. The Spirit spoke through an angel’s voice on Easter Sunday morning, “He is not here; He is risen.” The Spirit speaks through the Word, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you,” (Romans 8:11). May the Spirit of life continue to speak to you in this place and through you in the places the Spirit sends you. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.