

50 Days Ablaze! Sermon Series 2  
Pentecost – June 4, 2006  
Luke 22:54-62  
Rev. Barry J. Keurulainen

## **Pentecost Sermon: “Can These Bones Live?”**

“Last night as the eighth graders sat here, I reminded them of the last field trip they took while they were here at St. Luke School. Mind you they’ve gone to New York City, they’ve gone to Washington, DC. A variety of great places, but I think the last field trip was one of the best. It’s on Thursday, that I took the eighth graders for a walk up to the cemetery. It’s something I do each year with eighth graders, I take them to the cemetery and inevitably I ask them the question, “Why here?” on our last class, “Why here?” And inevitably every eighth grade class gives the same answer. “Because we’re going to end up here.”

I said, “No, that’s not why.” (chuckle) I said to them on that field trip to the cemetery, cemeteries teach us a lot. Cemeteries bear testimony and witness to many important things. And I went on to describe how in the 6 chief teachings that we looked at in our years together – Apostles Creed, Ten Commandments, Lord’s Prayer, Baptism, Communion, Confession and Absolution – how all of that is embodied and testified to in that cemetery.

I’ve always had a thing about cemeteries. You knew I was weird and twisted, now you can just confirm it. You can blame my Aunt Rachel. My mom’s sister. She’s been with the Lord now since ’85. My two fondest memories of Aunt Rachel are: 1. baking cookies with her. My love for baking was rooted in that experience. But secondly, across from her home there was a cemetery and she would often take me to the cemetery and we would walk through and just look at the monuments and tombstones. And you gotta understand that in New England that’s no small deal. The tombstones would read 1700 and even 1600 and the history was amazing. But she would always take me by family stones and tell me the history of my family. Cemeteries are an important part of living to understanding what life is all about, and what’s really important. But I suspect that my Aunt Rachel didn’t come up with the idea first. That is of the importance of taking somebody through a cemetery. God had that idea a long time ago.

If you doubt that, you can either open your Bibles to Ezekiel 37 or look at page 3 in your bulletins. Ezekiel 37 – I understand that for the nation of Israel all is lost, or so it seems. The nation of Israel has been overcome and defeated. They have been taken to exile. The capital city has been destroyed. The young soldiers have been wiped out, murdered and killed and left to die and rot on the ground. Not even the decency of burying them. And those who did survive are now in exile living lives out in a godforsaken place, believing that there is nothing to hope for ever again.

Young Ezekiel, the prophet, is a 30 year old man, thereabouts. He had always had aspirations of serving in the temple, but there is no more temple anymore. It’s destroyed. There seems to be no hope for Ezekiel or for the people of Israel. And then Ezekiel 37. “*1 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.*” Mind you we’re not talking skeletons, we’re not talking even about dead bodies with dead flesh on them. These are so rotten, so decayed, that the skeletons have broken down and it’s just bones. “*2 He led me back and forth among them, and I*

*saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.*” As if to press home the point, Al and Joan, God wants to make sure you don’t miss it. If ever there was an impossible situation, this is it. I mean after all, God’s done a few amazing things with dead people, right? Somebody dies and in a day or two later, God raises them up. But this seems impossible. All that’s left are pieces of bones. No skeletons, no frame, no structure, no flesh, no muscle, nothing.

Verse 3: *“He asked me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’”* Give Ezekiel some credit for his answer here. *“O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.”* If it had been me I would have said “No way!” (chuckle) I think Ezekiel at this moment recognizes with God anything’s possible. Tuck that away. Don’t forget that moment right there. Did Ezekiel understand that with God, He can do the absolutely ridiculous thing, when it seems impossible. *“Oh God, you alone know.”* Or was it that Ezekiel understood that these bones were the way they were because God in His anger, God in His wrath, God in His justice, had dealt a blow to Israel. And now the God who had done this is saying through Ezekiel can these bones live again, and I’m wondering if Ezekiel is saying, “I don’t know. You’re the one who did this. You alone know. Do You want to reverse it?”

There is a lot going on in that simple response. Then it continues, v. 4 *“ Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to these bones (you know what prophesied means – it means to preach.) Preach to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!’ 5 This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. 6 I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.”*

You’ve got to be kidding me. I preached to a few crowds that have fallen asleep on me once in a while – you never have right? – no. I’ve never preached to a bunch of dry bones. God is saying to Ezekiel I what you to preach to this valley of dry bones. **“Dry bones!”** This God makes us do weird stuff doesn’t He? Well, look at Ezekiel, to his credit, Ezekiel does it.

Mark Wilt last night in talking to the eighth graders after hearing the sermon, said that one of the things he admires about Ezekiel, is that even though it seemed ridiculous, Ezekiel did it. Ezekiel realized “I’m not God, He is, I’m going to do it.” I thought that was a good teaching point. I’ll steal it for this morning.

Verse 7: *“7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone.”*

Foot bone to the ankle bone, ankle bone to the knee bone, knee bone to – you know the song, do you want to sing it? No, no we’re not going to sing it. Can you imagine Braden? Can you imagine being in a valley of dry bones and all of a sudden the foot bone is connected to the ankle bone. All of a sudden the shin bone gets up and connects to the ankle bone – a little freaky?! I thought my eighth graders were freaked out in the cemetery up here. This would be a lesson they would never forget!

v. 8 *I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. 9 Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet-- a vast army. 11 Then he said to me: ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ 12 Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from*

*them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14 I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD."*

I understand what my Aunt Rachel was trying to teach me when she took me through cemeteries. I know what I was trying to teach the eighth graders when I took them through the cemetery on Thursday. What is God trying to teach Ezekiel? What do you think – out loud – anybody? What's the lesson? **Nothing** is impossible with God. Ezekiel, the nation has given up hope, maybe you've given up hope, all seems to be lost, but nothing is impossible when God is in the picture.

Take a look at v. *"11 Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' There's no hope! And God comes down to Ezekiel and says, "When I'm in the picture, there's always hope." What's God trying to teach us?*

You know, there are times in my life, seriously, there are times in my life when it feels as if I'm living in a valley of dry bones. Ever been there? You've ever been there? Feeling like you're living in a valley of dry bones? Has it ever been your lament, in v. 11, *"our bones are dried up, our hope is gone, we're cut off"* where you just felt everything is dead within me? Has there ever been a moment in your life where there has been such deep, deep, personal failure that you never thought you'd be able to live and succeed again? To laugh again? Has there ever been a moment in your life when you have been filled with such guilt, such shame over what you did, that you never thought you could look at a loved one again in the face, let alone in the mirror. Has there ever been a moment when there has been such paralyzing fear within you, because of what a doctor has said to you, or because of what was happening at work, or what was going on with your kid? That you thought, we're cut off, there's no hope. Our bones are dried up. What God was saying to Ezekiel, God says to me. That in the most hopeless of situations, when God is in the picture, there is always hope! When all seems dead, if God is there, it is amazing what God can do to bring dead things to life again. It may be that within your heart you feel no love for a particular person, you feel only hatred, and it feels as if your heart, your bones, and your body and your life have dried up. And yet in the valley of those dried bones, God comes and He says, I can bring life again. That's the message I hear to the prophet and to you and to me. How does God do it? Take a look at the text.

Take a look at v. 4 *'Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! 5 This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, ... v. 7 'So I prophesied as I was commanded and as I was prophesizing there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together. Bone to bone.'* What this tells me this is that the word of God has power. The word of God has a creative power. You see in Genesis 1, it says, *"and God said let there be light. And there was light."* *"Let there be land. There was land."* Just the speaking of God's word, did things. It created things.

Friday, I was with the kids in chapel and I was talking about the benediction. You know at the end when Pastor Jason or I say the "the Lord Bless you and keep you. The Lord ..."  
You've got to understand that in a Hebrew mindset, a Jewish mindset SuZee, when the benediction was spoken, when the words came out of a patriarchs mouth, those words had power. They put into effect whatever the words said. Remember that whole Isaac, Esau, Jacob thing? Where the blessing was spoken and they wanted him to take it back and he said no. Once

spoken, that's it. It's in effect. Those words are already beginning to change things. I believe that! I believe that when God speaks His word, it has a way of creating things new. When I hear what's going on with Ezekiel here, is reminiscent of creation in Genesis one. God says I want you to speak this, because when My Word is spoken, it can create things out of nothing. It may be Roy, that once in awhile in your life, that there is just nothing in your heart. No joy, no love, no peace. But the Word of God can create out of NOTHING tremendous hope, and joy and peace. That's the message I hear here. In those moments when we feel like we're living in the midst of dry bones, when we ourselves are cut off, that's when we need to be in the Word. I said to the eighth graders, if you have learned anything from your time here at St. Luke, remember this: BE IN THE WORD! Because it's that Word that will prevent you from being *cut off, from feeling hopeless!* So that in the most hopeless of situations, you can always see what God has been able to create out of nothing. But be careful, Doug and Cathy, it's not just knowing the Word in your head. Just reading the Bible on your own isn't enough. 'Cause you notice what happened in this text? After Ezekiel spoke the Word, there were skeletons, there was muscle, there was sinew, there was tissue, there was skin, but there was no what? There was no breath, there was no life. And he said the son of man, prophesy to the spirit of the wind to come and now don't you see once again reminiscence of creation of Genesis 1. God creates Adam out of the ground, and then He breathes into him, through his nostrils the breath of life. It's just creation all over again.

Leda, it's not enough for you and I just to be in the Word, to be in devotion. That's still to much you and me. We have to depend on the Spirit of God. What does God say in the prophet Zachariah, "*not by mite, not by power, but by My Spirit will I accomplish my purpose.*" Sometimes, we are just not enough Spirit-led.

What is it that cause that staff person at Concordia home to say to Mimi, to Esther, will I see you tomorrow? And when she answer that she did, that she wasn't comfortable with that to the point that she had to tell me. That's a Spirit-led person. And I believe what happens here, is that we see that the Spirit of God is able to bring to life that which God has put in the heart. In the most hopeless of situations in our life, I believe that what God is saying is that His word can create out of nothing that which we always thought to be impossible and that His Spirit can breathe life and hope and joy into us.

There is a beautiful, beautiful prayer that I have discovered. It's that little white insert. Can you turn to it right now? Leda, will you come up and join me? I don't know about you, but in my prayer life, I often just focus my prayers on Jesus as it should be. But I find that sometimes I'm a little bit deficient in focusing in what the Spirit could be doing in my life. I just don't focus enough on His indwelling. Not at the cost of diminishing Jesus' role and beauty and glamour in my life, but none the less to experience the Spirit who lives inside of me and I found this prayer. Leda and I are going to pray it together responsively. We just want you to follow along and pray it quietly as we pray it for us. Please note, and I apologize for this, at the very end of your prayer, you'll hear us reading 5 lines that are not on your paper. Just don't be confused by that, just listen to them with your heart. But let us pray this together as we focus on God who in an impossible, hopeless situation breathes unto us the breath of the life through His Spirit. We pray.

*Blest Holy Spirit*

O Spirit of God, brooding over the formless world:

Brood over my spirit. Blest Holy Spirit.

O Spirit of God, giving form to the formless:  
fashion my spirit. Blest Holy Spirit.  
O Spirit of God, bringing order out of chaos:  
order my spirit. Blest Holy Spirit.  
O Spirit of God, giving life to the lifeless: give life  
to my spirit. Blest Holy Spirit.  
O Spirit of the Lord, inspiration of the prophets:  
Speak of my spirit. Blest Holy Spirit.  
O Holy Spirit, author of holiness: sanctify my  
Spirit. Blest Holy Spirit.  
O Holy Spirit, knowing the deep things of God:  
Move in the depths of my being. Blest Holy Spirit.

Fire of the Spirit! Burn all that is not holy.  
Blest Holy Spirit.  
Fire of the Spirit! Shine with thy light.  
Blest Holy Spirit.  
Fire of the Spirit! Kindle with thy warmth.  
Blest Holy Spirit.  
Fire of the Spirit! Generate in us power.  
Blest Holy Spirit.  
Fire of the Spirit! Inflame us with love.  
Blest Holy Spirit.  
Wind of the Spirit! Breathe in us thy gentleness.  
Blest Holy Spirit.  
Wind of the Spirit! Blow in thy strength.  
Blest Holy Spirit.

Let us pray for the gift of the Spirit.  
The gift of the Spirit is wisdom and understanding,  
resourcefulness and spiritual strength, knowledge  
and true godliness, and holy fear. Grant us thy  
sevenfold gift, O Holy Spirit.  
Blest Holy Spirit.  
Let us pray for the fruit of the Spirit.  
The harvest of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, good  
temper, gentleness, goodness, humility and  
self-control. Produce in us thy harvest,  
O Holy Spirit.  
Blest Holy Spirit. Amen

I need this. I need this, because don't you see, that as dry as the bones were in that valley for Ezekiel, as dead as those soldiers were, I am no less dead without Jesus Christ. It is into my spiritual deadness, it is into my spiritual hostility, that through the waters of baptism my God breathed life into me. He poured out His Spirit into me. Without the Spirit, I'm dead to God.

Without the Spirit I'm hostile to God. My sinful nature is always inclined to focus on me. My sinful nature is always inclined to see you as the enemy. I need this. And I have this by right of His gracious gift through baptism. In the most hopeless of situations God breathes into me hope. How can I be so sure of this? How can I be so certain that God does this?

Because I've been taken to another cemetery. Just as my Aunt Rachel took me to one cemetery and I took the kids to another, the Holy Spirit in faith has taken me to another cemetery where He brought me to a grave and it's empty. The Holy Spirit in faith has brought me to the grave of my Jesus Christ, but the body is not there. And He has shown me my Jesus to be alive. He has shown me that my Jesus beat and conquered and defeated completely, sin and death and the wicked evil powers of Satan.

What do I have to fear? When I've been to that cemetery, I go into the rest of my life knowing that nothing is hopeless. No situation is so bad that I have to live empty. But only pray that on this day of Pentecost, I will experience my own personal Pentecost when the Spirit fills me anew with love, and joy, and peace, and hope. In Jesus name. Amen