

SERMON LENT 5A – MARCH 29, 2020

Text: Ezekiel 37:1-14, also Jn. 11:25-26 and Rom. 8:10-11

- I. In last Sunday's gospel lesson we heard Jesus say, "I am the light of the world"
 - In today's gospel we hear Him say, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live"
 - Both of these texts come from the gospel of John. I am reminded that in the opening verses of his gospel, John introduces these two great over-arching theme: "In Him (Jesus) was life; and the life was the light of men" (Jn. 1:4)

- II. The Ezekiel text for today describes that opposite condition of natural (sinful) humankind... lifelessness and darkness. Those two words describe the human condition without God.
 - Ezekiel uses the image of dry bones to describe this human condition
 - These bones cannot see and they cannot hear... they are in the dark
 - They are totally helpless and hopeless
 - Every person feels the cruel and oppressive burden of helplessness and hopelessness at some point in their life. Some are aware of it more than others
 - In Ezekiel's time, things looked especially hopeless for Judah and Jerusalem. The Babylonians had conquered them with unspeakable cruelty. Their city and temple were burned to the ground. Their royal family and warriors were killed or enslaved. Women were ravished and babies dashed to pieces. The brightest and best of the people... craftspeople and educated people skilled in healing and teaching, technology and art... anybody skilled in leadership... they were all hauled off in captivity to Babylon. This was a people who were humiliated with no home and no possibilities for a meaningful future. They were as hopeless and helpless as dry bones bleaching in the desert.

-But the God made manifest in Jesus Christ is full of life and hope... a very present help in time of trouble (Ps. 46:1). God speaks to the dry bones through the prophecy of Ezekiel. The bones re-assemble into skeletons but on flesh and skin. They are resurrected into live human beings full of strength and hope

III. God speaks His word of life, hope and help to every generation and every person who discerns that the human condition is like a valley of dry bones.

-William Shakespeare gave words to the feeling of helplessness and hopeless of life in Macbeth's Soliloquy:

"Tomorrow and to-morrow, and to-morrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recoded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing"

IV. Most of us have experienced the valley of dry bones in our life... a time when we felt particularly helpless and hopeless

-Perhaps it was at a time of failing health and strength or a time when we encounter death and grief. Perhaps it was a time when we had to face up to a moral failure or a relationship once loving, then gone sour and bitter

-Our country and our present world is facing such a time of helplessness in threat of Covid 19 infection and death

-We ask ourselves at times like this: "Shall these bones of mine ever live and love and experience joy again?"

-It's a question very similar to what God says to Ezekiel: "Son of man, can these bones live?"

V. The answer the Bible gives is a qualified "yes"

1) IF you listen to the Word of the Lord, the answer is "yes"

2) IF God breathes His Spirit into you, the answer is "yes"

-Now... we have to answer the question that Jesus asks Martha in our gospel lesson, after He tells her that He is the resurrection and the life...

"Do you believe this?"

-Do you not only believe that Jesus can raise the dead but that He also can change the direction of our life so that we can repent and live a new kind of life?

-The direction our lives take and the principles we uphold depend on what we believe (or who we believe in!)

VI. The movie, *Second Hand Lions* is a fun film worth watching

-It's about two bachelor uncles played by Robert Duvall and Michael Caine. They are forced by sad circumstances to take in their grand nephew to live with them.

-Duvall's character is a retired French Foreign Legion officer. He gives part of his "becoming a man" speech to his grand nephew.

-Things worth believing, he tells his grand nephew, can't wait for someone else to prove them, you have to just believe them

-Part of that speech is: "...that good always triumphs over evil... that honour and courage and loyalty mean everything... that power and money, money and power are nothing... and that true love never dies"

-It was a good speech. However it is a sad fact that human love does die. It dies when we die

-The only love that never dies is God's love

-Isn't it wonderful that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son... so that our dry bones can live? He loves us before we even have a chance to love Him. If we believe in that God, we have it all

VII. I believe that God will raise me from the dead for Christ's sake

-I believe that He will deliver me from what the Psalmist calls "the pit" ... that dark place of despair and hopeless helplessness that Shakespeare's Macbeth talks about

-That's the place my own sin and the evil one wants to send me. Thanks be to Christ Jesus who redeems me by His cross so that I can be hopeful... even joyful in the middle of threatening and trying times.

-I believe this because the Holy Spirit has given me the gift of faith and I believe it because I have to... there is hope in no other

-Everyone who believes in Jesus has hope and an eternal life that is better in quality as well as quantity

-It is a gift from God for Christ's sake

-We are dead in our trespasses and sins as the Apostle Paul says, so we can't claim that we earned any blessing from God. Our dry bones only live because God speaks to us and breathes his Spirit on us.

-That is good news of great joy...

-Listen to this joyful song (it'll take a few seconds to load):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLg-v4CS4nQ>