**Ezekiel 37:1-14 (ESV)**

  The hand of the Lord was upon 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. **2** And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. **3** And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord God, you know.” **4** Then he said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. **5** Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. **6**  And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.” **7** So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. **8** And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had 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 the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” **10** So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. **11** Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ **12** Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. **13** And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. **14** And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord.”

**“The Life Giving Word”**

 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Part of the popular view today is that people can remake themselves. Life becomes something more to play with or redesign, rather than what we are to cherish. If things are not going the way you had hoped just change it. Look for that fresh start. A new beginning waits for you. Promising prospects are just around the corner. Go ahead and just press that “reset” button. Infinite choices are available. Find the one that works best for you. There are more than enough people willing to help. Their professions all seek to remake life the way you want.

 In the midst of all the ways to spoil life as God gives it. Lent is a journey greater than one of repentance. Jesus takes us twisting and cringing to where none wants to go. We know it leads to death. Before we sing, our “Hosannas” next week on Palm Sunday, we face what falls on all people. Rather than restoring Lazarus to health, Jesus lets death rear its ugly head. Ezekiel also saw a disturbing scene only to hear God ask, “How can these bones live?” Death lets us do nothing and speaks for itself. Lent removes hiding from the pain and puts the truth for all to see on Jesus. Yet, His death on the cross is love that lets us confess every Sunday, “I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come.” We know how bones live. God breaths His life giving Word for the dead to live.

 Ezekiel was different from many other prophets in the Old Testament. He was preaching to a broken people in the deep darkness of Babylon. Israel had suffered a great loss at the hand of God’s Law. The many dry bones Ezekiel saw in His vision were a sign of this destruction. Their sinfulness was the source of such judgment. “So I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed in the land, for the idols with which they had defiled it.” (Ezekiel 36:18). Israel’s disobedience brought only death. They physically and spiritually had no life in them. The Lord saw their dismal condition emptied of any glory. He declared to Ezekiel, “Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.”

 The dead cannot still take a breath under God’s Law. This is the sorry state of affairs since the Fall. By nature sinners no matter how they want to remake life or try to push the reset button. There is nothing but brokenness and exile from God. St. Paul said, “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.” We are hostile because the way of sinners all lead to one point, death. As the author from the book “Broken” that we are reading in Home Fires states, “Since good only exists as a gift from God, to be free from that goodness is to be the definition of evil. In this way, freedom from the many good things God has created…only becomes the decay and destruction of these good things” (study guide #1). Our sins show how dried up we are to what God says is good. Change this change that, one day our bones will be dead bones. Disobedience to God is nothing but physical and spiritual death.

 As much as Israel was in death, God’s grace would give life back to them by His Spirit. Ezekiel saw how this took place for God told Him, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.” His Word was life. His Word was hope. His Word was able to save. What became a mess of sinful chaos and scattered death God could restore His people and make them whole with His life. They would not only be physical deliverance from captivity to Babylon. The remnant would have spiritual newness by God’s Spirit giving life of faith in Him. There was nothing worthy to restore in such lifeless people. Yet, God’s undeserved favor was for them. Ezekiel’s word delivered this life giving Spirit of God declaring, “O breath, breathe on these slain, that they may live.”

 God breathes life back into the dead. It is by grace the Word speaks. Rather than a reset, Jesus gives the reason to hear saying, “I am the resurrection and the life.” He spoke to dead Lazarus this way as if he was already alive saying, “Lazarus, Come out.” He speaks the same way to dead sinners by His life given to them in baptism. There was nothing worthy to restore in us, but Christ does it out of love. His forgiveness comes from the death He paid on the cross. “For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” This is spiritual freedom for the repentant to hear God forgive ours many sins by the servants of His Word. Where Jesus even comes to strengthen us by His true body and blood for the physical battle we face in our bodies. The means of God’s Word and sacrament breathe life back into dry bones. It is not freewill or free choice, but Christ speaking faithfully to save sinners.

 What Israel had lost as a dead people, the prophet Ezekiel brought back as hope of life from God. The way was not an easy solution to their problems. The return to Israel was not going to be so glorious. Their blessing was only in part because God had a bigger picture. Restoration of life was one thing, but the resurrection to life everlasting is quite another. “And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land.” The whole house of Israel would be more than what any expected for this life. The act of God’s love was a new kingdom not of earth, but from heaven. “Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”

 The breath of God is His gracious gift of life forever. Lent will soon give way to Holy Week for the Christian Church. Our Lord Jesus Christ by His Passion promises life out of His death for sinners. He alone gives hope beyond whatever hope for good God gives in this world. St. Paul said, “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.” The reformation focused on life God gave by His Word. No restoring, no remaking, no work of man will change the many and dry bones that have gone before us. Luther tells us, “I feel and see plainly enough that I and all men must sink into the grave and there decay. But the Word speaks differently to me. It tells me that I shall rise in great glory and live forever” (Plass 1216:3875). God breaths His life giving Word for the dead to live. Jesus does it now and finally on the Last Day. Your best life will be at His Word for both body and soul to have life everlasting in Him. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.