

Pentecost B, 2009

Text: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Title: Death and Life

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Are you alive? Is the person sitting next to you? How do you know? Can you be sure? Remember your First Aid. Check for a pulse. Check for signs of breathing. If your heart and your lungs give out, the brain will soon follow.

Everyone dies of the same cause- lack of oxygen to the brain. The air comes in through your mouth down through your windpipe into your lungs, from your lungs into the blood stream and then your heart pumps the precious oxygen throughout your body. If the oxygen doesn't come in or if it doesn't go where it needs to go, then that's it for you. So take a few deep breaths. Feel the air moving through your body, and know that you are alive.

Now the folks in that Ezekiel saw in the valley were obviously dead. Only bones were left. Dry bones. You can't check a skeleton's pulse. You can't listen for signs of breath. Someone with no lungs and no heart and no brain is obviously dead.

Ezekiel surely wondered why the Lord had brought him to such a place, to this valley of dry bones. Why would the Lord had brought him to this place of death and despair and desolation? It was an object lesson.

Those dry bones pointed to the nation of Israel. Israel was dead. They had no hope. They had nothing. They had been conquered so they had no king. Jerusalem was destroyed, so they had no temple. They were in exile, so they had no land. Without king, temple, and land, they were nothing. No religion, no government, no economy. They were destined to be absorbed into the melting pot of the Babylonian empire. As a people, they were dead. Sure, there were individuals who were still alive, still breathing, still had a pulse. But their identity was gone. Their nation was gone. They were dead, dry bones.

But that was soon to change. There was a prophet among the bones, one to speak to the bones. The Lord says, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord.'"

Now this sounds absurd- to talk to the dead, to talk to these dry bones. What good would that do? These skeletons don't even have ears. Why talk to these dead bones? But these are not ordinary words that Ezekiel speaks. They are not his own words. They are the Lord's words. And the Lord's words are no ordinary words.

Words are carried by breath. Breath is spirit. To breathe into someone is to inspire them. To breathe out your last breath is to expire. Your breath carries your words, and your breath is your spirit. Spirit, breath, words.

God's words are powerful, because they are carried by His Spirit. When God wants to breathe into someone, He uses His words. He speaks, and His words are carried by His breath, His Spirit, and His Spirit is life. When the Lord speaks, He speaks life. His Words are Spirit and Life. When the Lord speaks, amazing things happen.

Bones are brought together and covered with flesh. Breath enters dead skeletons and corpses and brings them back to life, all through His Word.

The Lord says to us, "I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live." You are alive because you have been filled with the Lord's Spirit, His holy breath. The Lord's Spirit gets into you and enlivens you.

You took your first breath at Holy Baptism. The Word of the Lord was spoken, and His breath filled your tiny little lungs and brought you to life. You were dead when your parents brought you to the font. As Paul writes in Ephesians, "You were dead in your sins and your trespasses." Dead. Road kill. Dry bones. You may have been crying and screaming your little lungs out. But you were still dead.

Those who don't have the Holy Spirit are not really alive. You might be able to get a pulse, and you might feel their hot breath on your cheek, but they are really dead. If you've seen the Pirates of the Caribbean, you know what I'm talking about. These are the living dead. It's only a matter of time before time reveals them for who they really are.

As you go about your life, you will meet many of these folks. People who look like healthy, vibrant people, but inside they are nothing but dry bones. No spirit, No life. But the Lord spoke His Spirit into you and brought you to life. He gave you a new life, a Holy life.

God's Spirit is the Holy Spirit. He's the Holy Spirit, because He makes you Holy.

"Holiness" is difficult to grasp, because there's nothing like it out there in the world. God is Holy. Holiness is what makes God who He is. Only God is Holy. When God breathes into you, He breathes His life into you and you are holy. You participate in the holiness of God. God fills you with His life.

You are a member of the body of Christ, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. The body of Christ is alive because it is filled with the Holy Spirit. It has a pulse, it is a living body, it is a breathing body because it is filled with the Holy Spirit.

God's Spirit is not something we ever possess or hold on to, no more than you can hold onto the wind or the breath that escapes from your lips. God's Spirit is something that flows into you and through you.

God breathes in- He speaks His words of love and forgiveness. You breathe out- You speak His word back to Him in prayer and praise. God breathes in, you breathe out. Words go in, words come out. This is what it means to be alive.

I began by asking you if you were alive. Now it's time to check if you're truly alive. It's time to check your true pulse. Is God's breath, His Spirit, flowing into you? Do His words get into you? Do they come out of you? Or have you been holding your breath?

And where does confirmation fit into all of this?

You, Andrew, Taylor, and Jacob, first received the Holy Spirit, the breath of God when you were baptized. Your parents and sponsors promised to bring you faithfully to God's house, to place in your hands the Holy Scriptures and provide for your further instruction, so that you may come to the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood. This they have done, with God's help, and so we rejoice this day.

In a few minutes you will confess all that the Lord has done for you. How He has created you, redeemed you, and sanctified you. These words were first breathed into you at your baptism, and now you will breathe them out for all the world to hear. You will promise to keep breathing and not to hold your breath. You will promise to make faithful use of His Word and Sacraments. You are promising to let the Lord breathe His Holy Spirit into you regularly, and for His life to flow through you.

This is a weighty promise, and too much for you to commit to on your own. In the years ahead you will probably fail. You will decide that you'd rather play in the big game, go out with your friends or sleep in, rather than come to hear the Lord's Word and receive His body and blood.

When you do this, you are depriving your body of the very oxygen you need to live. Apart from the Lord's Spirit you will waste away and die, and soon you will be like those dry bones in the valley.

This is a serious matter. Many who have kneeled before this very altar have stopped breathing and slowly wasted away. If you want to live, to enjoy life and all that God has made you to be, this is the place where He made you alive through His Spirit as He fills your ears and your mouths with His words.

You are about to get a big dose of His words and His Spirit. These words will be spoken directly to you. You will hear the name given to you in your baptism and the hand will go on your head so that you know for sure that these words and this Spirit are for you. You will hear these words, "God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give you his Holy Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge, of grace and prayer, of power and strength, of sanctification and the fear of the Lord."

These are not my words, but the Lord's words. They were first spoken by the prophet Isaiah about the promised Messiah. Jesus was filled with wisdom and knowledge, grace and prayer, power and strength, sanctification and the fear of the Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit delivered all these things to Him.

Jesus now passes all these things on to you, through His Holy Spirit. As Jesus says in our Gospel, "The Spirit will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to

you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.” The Spirit delivers the life, the breath of Jesus into you this day.

“I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live.” Let’s do it. Amen.