

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord and Redeemer. Amen. The title for today’s sermon is “Speaking to the Wind” and is from the Old Testament reading, from Ezekiel chapter 37. Let us pray Amen.

Do you ever have times when you feel as though when you pray you are only speaking to the wind? The words come out of your mouth, but, does God really hear you? Does God even really care to hear you? Or, do you ever wonder or struggle with the question of whether God’s Word really does what the Bible claims it should do?” When you share God’s Word with the people around you, why don’t you always get the results you expect as Peter got at Pentecost? For that matter, why don’t I?

It can be a real struggle when things don’t go in the direction we feel as though they should go, or when we don’t get the results that we would hope for. It is one thing to believe God exists, but sometimes it is hard to see His plan and His presence here with us today. It is for this reason I really appreciate the prophet Ezekiel. He went through all kinds of struggles as a visual example of God’s coming judgment on the nation of Israel. I’m sure even Ezekiel had times when he wondered why everything was happening the way it did.

As such, today’s Old Testament reading is one of my very favourites in the Old Testament. It’s also from one of the two most familiar chapters in the Book of Ezekiel. In today’s reading God picked up Ezekiel and placed him in the middle of the valley of the dead. An army had been slaughtered some time previous and the dead were left cursed and in shame for the wild animals to pick clean. The slain were abandoned where they fell in the valley of slaughter to dry up, which they had, and their bones were bleached by the sun. BUT the battle and slaughter were not the end of the story, in fact the specific reason for the huge death count is not even mentioned by Ezekiel because this here is the beginning. God was not done with those dry bones. Instead God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones. In a way, Ezekiel was told to talk to the dried up bones and to tell them to listen to God’s Word. ?Better late than never? But as surely as God said, at the speaking and hearing of God’s Word those dry, bleached, and dead bones came back together; sinews restored, flesh and skin covered them, . . . but there was no life in them. Those dry bones had started to hear and were no longer dry, but the hearing and restoring was not complete.

Now could you have blamed Ezekiel if he had just walked away at that point? Yes, something absolutely amazing just happened, but it wasn’t enough. The bodies weren’t responding, they weren’t breathing, they . . . were . . . still . . . dead. Ezekiel could have turned to God and said, ‘Your Word just didn’t work. I tried but it didn’t do what You said it would. I prophesied Your Word, I spoke to those dry bones but look, things may have started to come together but the corpses are still corpses, there is no life in them. I tried my best, so I guess I’m just not good enough so You had better find someone else.’

And Ezekiel could have been right,...at least by worldly standards. The bodies were still lying dead in the middle of the valley. While their condition was slightly improved for the moment, if something else didn't happen, shortly they would begin to stink, again, to rot and decompose, again, they would become food for scavenger, again, and return to their former dried up state. Yet despite what could have looked like a failure, it was not.

It was not, and is not because the beauty of God's Word is it is not dependant on Ezekiel, or us. God didn't tell Ezekiel to go put the bones back together and put them all back together; God simply told Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones and to allow Him, the Holy Spirit, to do the work through His Word. We, along with Ezekiel, share in the same privilege as redeemed children of God to be allowed to simply speak God's Word first breathed into us and to allow the Holy Spirit to work in the live and people around us and bring those dry bones around us back together. God's Word of the Gospel is not some magical incantation for which we control the outcome, rather **“it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”**(Romans 1:16).

This is because God's Word is not about us; rather God's Word is about Christ Jesus who came for us. When we try to make His Word to be about us, or if we try to manipulate God and His Word to only get what we want, we have a serious problem. Any god that we control is no god at all, but a slave, at best it might be a genie. At times like this we need to refocus and see who God really is and what He does through His Word in us, for us, and through us. We don't shape His Word, it needs to shape us through His Word. Some groups like to think of worship as us giving God what He needs; our praising, our singing, and our prayers, yet that too elevates us above God instead seeing God for who He is, God Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, including us as part of His creation. In worship, the main focus and purpose of the Divine Service is not about us doing something nice or good for God; rather it is about God doing something for us, Him speaking His Word of grace and forgiveness in Christ to us poor dead sinners.

Now, going back to the reading, after the bodies were re-assembled, God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the wind,... to prophesy to the breath. But God was not telling Ezekiel to prophesy to just some unseen wind that passes and has no power, God was telling Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath. Wind, or breath, is needed for life. The scene is similar to the beginning of Genesis, when **“the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”**(Genesis 2:7) Before Ezekiel, the bones were already formed, they just needed the breath of life provided by the Holy Spirit. Just as Adam received life from the Breath of God, so did the multitude in the valley. Ezekiel was not told to give mouth to mouth to the corpses, Ezekiel was called to prophesy to the breath and allow God to breathe life into the bodies.

You too have received this breath of life by the working of the Holy Spirit! God breathed His breath into you and brought you from death to life. This began in Holy Baptism when God

joined His Word of promise to the water where there you were drown and you did died to sin and were raised to new and eternal life in Christ through faith by the working of the Holy Spirit(Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). Even faith is a gift of God, **“for faith comes from hearing, and hearing the Word of Christ.”**(Romans 10:17) The same God who called Lazarus from death to life was called you from eternal death to eternal life. Jesus told Nicodemus this when He said, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”**(John 3:5-8) This is because, as Paul writes in the Epistle, **“But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life and righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raise 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 8:10-11)

Now in looking at the Ezekiel reading you might ask yourself, ‘Why did God choose those dry bones, in that valley, of all the dry bones in the world, to raise them from the dead?’ The simple answer is; to demonstrate God’s undeserved grace and favour.(Ephesians 2:1-10) The more complex answer is, **“it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”**(1 Timothy 2:3-4) This is because, as God previously told Ezekiel, **“He has no pleasure in the death of anyone,...”**(Ezekiel 18:32) God used Ezekiel, a mere man, to proclaim God’s own Word of Life to the dry bones: as God continues to use simple means to communicate His message and grace and forgiveness to us today.

The dry bones heard God’s Word and God breathed His breath, His Wind, His Spirit into the dead bodies and brought them from death and gave them life. This whole reading revolves around the free and undeserved grace and favour of God on those who least deserve it, those who could not contributed anything to it, those who were dead in their sins; God gave these sinners, life, and it abundantly by His grace.

Now, there are two other reasons why I like this Ezekiel reading so much; First is because, in part, I can see myself personally involved in something very similar to Ezekiel’s preaching. Someone standing up, guided and directed by God Himself to proclaim God’s own life giving Word to dead, dry bones. But here is the rub, I am not Ezekiel but one the dry dead bones given faith and life through hearing God’s Word, and saved by grace on account of Jesus Christ. The second reason is it shows the hope we all share in the resurrection of the flesh. Because Christ came, died in our place, and rose on the third day we too share in the promise that when Christ returns on the Last Day He will resurrect all who have died, rejoining each soul to their body for eternity and all who believe in Christ Jesus will spend eternity with Him. God will restore all who have died and they will be restored.

Until then, God calls us to come into His house, and into His Sanctuary, because here God comes to us through simple means to proclaim His Word of grace, forgiveness, and eternal life into our dead ears. Instead of us speaking to the wind, God speaks to us through simple means, proclaims His Gospel, and administers His Sacraments to bring us from shame to honour, and from death to life in Christ.

So, does God hear our prayers – absolutely yes, every single one. We know because our Lord and Saviour not only gave us the words to pray, but He also tells us that we “ought always to pray”(Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17) because “**In the day of my trouble I call upon *the Lord, for He answers me.***”(Psalm 86:7)

Does God’s Word do what Scripture says it should – yes but not necessarily in our time but in His time and for His glory as God told Isaiah: “**so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.**”(Isaiah 55:11)

Does God care for you – more than you could ever imagine. God gave His very only Son into your flesh, to take your sins, to die, and to rise so you would have life and hope in Christ. In Christ Jesus and on account of Him, God provides for you all that you need in this body and life. We also have the assurance from God that we will be raised on the Last Day and all who believe will live eternally with Christ.

So, will things always go our way? Unfortunately no, yet sometimes that can be a blessing as it keeps our eyes in our Lord and Saviour, and His promises. But can anything in all of creation separate you from the love of God in Christ? Not a chance! You are God’s own cherished child. He is with you now and always providing all you need in this body and this life to eternity. Thanks be to God! Amen.

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