

Sermon April 2 2017 – Lent 5

*Based on the Reconciliation series put on by the ABC District*

## **Repentance leads us to New Life**

Ezekiel 37:3



Dear friends in Christ, Grace and peace from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

For the last few Sundays we have been meditating on the theme of Repentance. On the first Sunday we talked about the need for repentance due to our sin, seeking God's forgiveness. The second Sunday we heard that repentance leads to true worship, as God calls us to worship in truth and spirit. Last Sunday heard that repentance leads to

the light, the Light of Christ! And today we shall meditate on the fact that Repentance leads us to New Life.

If ever there was a time when we needed to get back to the Word of God, that time is now! It doesn't take a rocket science to figure out that we live in perilous times, and it seems to get worse by the day. That's hearing again God's word from today's Old Testament reading is important for it brings us hope.

Now, when you see a bone, whatever its condition, you know something is wrong, that death has taken place. After all, a bone with no flesh on it is associated with death, for it has lost its source of attachment and nourishment.

Likewise in the spiritual life, a dry bone is one that has no attachment to God's Word, consequently is not receiving any nourishment. Sadly, that is a condition that describes much of God's church today and many of God's people, it is a sad condition and it's getting worse. And we may even resent the fact that we are called dry bones. But that's what the Law does, it point us to our condition, so the issue then is not so much that it hurts to be called or compared to dried bones, but what those dried bones can be given life. That those dried up bones can have life again.

But, how can these dry bones be given new life?

Ezekiel prophesied during one of the worst times in Israel's history. Yes this is back in the past, many centuries ago, but if you bear with me for a moment and realize what happen and that what happened to Israel gest repeated even now in this century.

As you see, things had been going along so well for the nation back then. And it was for so long that the people had become complacent toward God, just like in our time, time of excess and prosperity. It is a truth that the better off we are in the temporal sense, the less we look to the Lord. As we said last Sunday, the more affluent our society becomes, the less Godly it becomes...there is a direct correlation.

When our freezers and closets are full, we don't think we need God and we can easily become complacent. When we have money for our prioritized indulgencies the less priority we put into God's word, instead we go after our man made idols, just like in the days of the prophet Ezekiel, when people had rejected their covenant with God in

favour of false gods.

And so, for their faithlessness God warned them through Ezekiel to repent or face His judgement. Early in the book of the prophet Ezekiel God sent him to tell his people: "Thus says the Lord God to the mountains and the hills, to the ravines and the valleys; Behold I will bring a sword upon you and I will destroy your high places. Your altars shall become desolate and your incense altars will be broken. And I will lay the dead bodies of the people of Israel before their idols and I will scatter your bones around your altars." (Ezekiel 6:3b-7)

Strong stuff!! Strong judgment, and it was so. Do you wonder why we lose faith in God and become like dried up bones? It happens when instead of staying strong in God's word, we let go, and follow after the things of the world.

So, by the time we come to chapter 37 in Ezekiel's message, Israel could only be described as being dead toward God, and the picture that describes their condition is a valley of dry bones.

Ezekiel describes it this way: "The hand of the Lord was brought 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. And He led me around among them, and behold, they were very dry. And He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, 'O Lord God, you know."

Now, when you see a pile of animal bones, its eerie in some ways, isn't it. Now imagine seen human bones, now that's a different story, but that's what God led Ezekiel to see and asks "son of man, can these bones live?"

What a questions is this Lord, can this bones live? It is an impossible situation! But Ezekiel had been faithful to God, so he knew better, he knew he had to trust God. After all he was God's preacher. He had preached repentance and trust in God over and over again, and yet he had still seen God's people wander away, and how frustrating that can be. He had seen cold-hearted people put God to the test time after time; he had to be very frustrated. He had seen how even religious people had made things to be about them instead of God, frustrating. But despite his surroundings, he could answer God's question in the way he knew, "Lord, you know." Good Answer!!

Ezekiel surveyed the bones, he took inventory to see what kind of condition they were in and his conclusion was that they were "very dry." No skin, no blood, not limbs to hold them together. They were dead, and with no story to tell, at least no pleasant story.

If they could have spoken they would have told a story of how, instead of being fed on God's living Word, they had been fed on the junk food of human ideas and philosophies. They would have told how instead of feeding on the Word of God that makes us like trees planted beside living water, they had been lapping up "chicken soup for the soul." They had itchy ears and they had surrounded themselves with preachers and teachers who told them what they wanted to hear. And as a result, instead of engaging in the battle against sin, they flocked to it like moths to a bright light. And in the end they had become a pile of dry bones.

That was the message in the dry bones that Ezekiel saw. They told the story of God's people. They had once been great in number and strong in faith. They served God in His kingdom and were faithful to His Word. But in time, sin had stolen their spiritual life and they had become nothing more than a pile of dead bones.

It isn't hard to make the connection to the church today, is it? Much of our

modern church has turned into a pop psychology, self-help, works-righteousness bone yard.

It has been said that those who refuse to learn from the past are doomed to repeat it. Therefore examining ourselves is crucial. Asking a few heartfelt questions, will help us identify if we are a bunch of dry bones or an army of faithful soldiers. Questions like, what is our spiritual diet? Do we hunger for God's Word or are we living in such a way that is killing our souls? Think of the poison that we ingest through the television and on the internet. Humanism tells us that we should listen to ourselves. Materialism tells us that we need more and more things. Existentialism tells us that there is no right and wrong. It is important to know that if we are following all these kinds of ideas, then we should know that there is only one place that those human philosophies will send people...to the bone yard.

But there is more, our own sins also turn us into dry bones. God gives us His name as a blessing and we use it to curse and swear. He gives us his powerful word, but we leave it unread and unapplied. He places authorities in our lives to help us and we rebel against them. We ruin our health by what we eat and drink and how we live. And what is the result? Our worship of God becomes half-hearted at best. Our daily walk with God becomes a struggle and our service to Him becomes motivated by guilt rather than from a thankful heart for all that He has given to us.

Like in Ezekiel's day, it doesn't look good, in fact it looks very bad. Now what? God told Ezekiel: "prophesy over the bones." Keep on preaching, keep saying the word and something marvellous is going to happen.

"O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. <sup>5</sup> Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup> 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."

"O dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord." What a comfort that is to faithful preachers and teachers of God's Word. Preach the Word God says, because it is the Holy Spirit working through God's Word that brings people to repentance and faith. It is the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God that gives life. What a powerful truth that is. It is God who gives physical and spiritual life in Christ. Jesus is the author, perfecter and finisher of our faith. The Scriptures tell us that we were dead, like dry bones, in our trespasses and sins. But God being rich in mercy, because of the great love in which He loved us, makes us alive together with Christ. It is God and God alone who brings the dead back to life. And he does by convicting us of our sin, a conviction that leads us to repentance, a conviction that leads us to faith in Christ. Christ, who who died for our sins and rose again for our eternal salvation.

Born again through water and the Spirit, the word tells us, but that's it...there's no other way.

And so that is what Ezekiel did. He tells us in verse 7, "I did as I was commanded, and there was a sound and behold a rattling and the bones came together, bone to bone. And behold there were sinews on them and flesh came upon them and skin covered them." All of a sudden there were bodies...they were back to life.

Well not quite yet, they looked alive but there was still something missing. And for that Ezekiel had to step out of the way. He had proclaimed the Word and now it was time for the Spirit of God to move, and that is the way it always works.

And so the encouragement to us today is to stick to the Word, that's what works repentance and faith. That's how God breathes life into dry bones. Sometimes we need to visit the valley of dead bones to be reminded of the truth so that we will not despair of being faithful to the Word of God.

Because Jesus obediently went to the cross for you and I, and was raised for our salvation, death has been defeated for all who repent and believe on Him as their Saviour. At the graveside of Lazarus, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" I pray that you do, because that is the only way our dead bones can be raised to eternal life.

Dry bones, hear now, hear now, the Word of the Lord.... Dear Lord your word has been preached. In the name of the Father and of the Son, amen.