



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

May 19, 2024

Pastor Phil Birner

The Festival of Pentecost

First Lesson/Sermon Text: [Ezekiel 37:1-14](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 51b

Second Lesson: [Acts 2:1-21](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 15:26-27, 16:4b-11](#)

### **Resurrection Reality: Christ Has Not Left Us Alone**

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

The movie Jason and the Argonauts came out when I was nine years old, and parts of it scared the living daylights out of me; especially the scene where Jason and two of his friends get into a fight with seven skeletons. You see these seven skeletons slowly being made to come to life. They start pushing up out of the ground. One arm comes out with a shield and lifts of the body with the next arm coming out with the sword, and they push up, climb up onto the earth and they go after Jason and his friends. The fight is almost hopeless because you really can't stab a skeleton. You certainly can't cut them real well. And besides that, these skeletons were incredible sword fighters. The two friends die. Jason, himself, keeps fighting and fighting and fighting and eventually, he gives up and he starts running as fast as he can. He jumps off a cliff, down into the sea. Of course, the seven skeletons go following right after him. While it appears these skeletons were incredibly good sword fighters, these skeletons couldn't swim and they sank right to the bottom and Jason got away.

On more mature reflection, I now realize that skeletons not only cannot swim but they can't do a whole lot else either. In college, in the science room, there was a skeleton and I always remember the professor yelling at us students not to mess with the skeleton because it was so fragile, as fragile as fine china. In fact, this skeleton was stored away in a glass cabinet, just like your fine china. What does an adult skeleton weigh, about 25 pounds? I guess what I'm saying is that if you are ever being chased by a skeleton, perhaps all you need to do is call in the services of your local five-year-old who does what five-year-olds do best, which is knock things over and break them.

Our Old Testament reading (which is our Sermon text this morning) presents us with what is probably one of THE strangest visions one of God's prophets ever got to see. The prophet, Ezekiel, records for us, ***"The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry."*** There is no doubt about it, these bones were all dead, just taking up a bunch of space down there in the valley. Presenting Ezekiel with this scene, God asks him a rather odd question. ***"Son of man, can these bones live?"*** You didn't have to be a doctor to know what the obvious answer was, except that today, on Pentecost, God is actually using these bones as an analogy, as kind of a basis of an argument. God's argument or (pardon the pun here) God's bones of contention is (1) are these bones worthless or somehow, somehow (the other side of this contention) (2) are they somehow worthwhile?

Like I said, on the face of it, the bone of contention here seems to be pretty obvious. You have piles and piles of dead bones all over the place. They are pretty worthless. But in case Ezekiel missed the point of the analogy, God quickly tells him, ***"Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'"*** What precipitates this little vision that Ezekiel sees is the fact that Ezekiel has just learned that his beloved city of Jerusalem has fallen to the Babylonians.

The Babylonians had taken a group of Jews (including Ezekiel) captive almost 12 years before. While sitting in the far off land of Babylon, Ezekiel and his fellow Jews had some hope that as long as Jerusalem was still up and going, things might turn out well. But what has happened is the worst case scenario has come true. Jerusalem has been utterly destroyed. Not only that, probably even worse, the beloved temple, that beautiful temple that King Solomon had built some 400 years before, that beautiful temple was put to the torch and it was razed. Now in their minds, this once proud nation of God's own chosen people has about as much chance of survival as a nation as does a pile of bones reviving into a person. Talk about feeling worthless.

God, though, was not real concerned about the Jews' political or nationalistic aspirations being dashed. God's concern was for their spiritual aspirations. Sadly, the Jewish people had disobeyed God. Indeed, many of them, if not most of them, had rejected their gracious God and all that He had to offer them. It wasn't as though they hadn't been warned. God was very patient with them. Time upon time He told them, "Please repent! Turn from your ways!" But they refused to repent. And now all of those prophecies of the Isaiah's, the Jeremiah's, the Hosea's, and countless other prophets had finally come home to roost, and their hopes of reconciling before their God were about the same as, again, dry bones coming to life.

[Ezekiel 37](#) is a vivid historical picture of what was going on back in the days of the Babylonian captivity, but it is also a very vivid picture that brings application to us as well. No doubt the scholarly St. Paul used this section of Ezekiel as the basis for his writings on our spiritual status; the status of us all. What is it? You were dead! You were dead in your trespasses and sin! And how dead is dead? You know as well as I do that there is no such thing as being a little bit dead. You don't ask the corpse to help carry in the casket. That's what pall bearers are for. And to be clear, our own sins make us very dead before God and there is no doubt that by nature, by birth, by our own virtue, we are spiritually dead, damned; unable to do anything pleasing to God and as spiritually dead as were the people Ezekiel was writing to, actually, skeleton dead; worthless, dry, dusty bones.

So the question that was addressed to Ezekiel today in our text has some serious implications for us as well. The question, **"Son of man, can these bones live?"** The big bone of contention being, are they (a) worthless as looks to be so obvious here or someway, somehow, (b) did they have any worth at all? God's question to Ezekiel, again, seems to be pretty obvious, except Ezekiel's answer back to God is a little bit interesting here. He says, **"Sovereign Lord, you alone know."** In other words, "You, O God, who made these bones in the first place, could probably make them alive. After all, you are the God who made man from the dust of the ground. Certainly you can make something living out of this valley of bones, which represents us all."

So Ezekiel is given the command by God, **"Prophecy..."** Actually, in our terminology, that would be "Preach." "Preach **to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!'**" Then what happens? You hear this rattling starting to take place; a rattling as bone starts to come together with bone as skeletons sort of start to assemble themselves. But there is more. Tendons and flesh appear upon them and skin. But God's miracle isn't over yet. At God's command, Ezekiel continues to preach to them: **"I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life."** And with God, as I said, anything is possible. These bones, corpses come to life. And with that, Ezekiel saw how God could and would recreate His people, now so hopelessly lost in the Babylonian captivity. God's bone of contention was that lifeless bones are worthwhile.

You hear a lot these days that *all of us are worthwhile because we've all been created in the image of God. There is some inherent good within each and every one of us and that God then sort of grabs onto that little bit of good that is within us.* But you know something? From our first sort of Sunday School Bible stories, we learn how in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve lost that image of God. They fell into sin and they were dead, just like Paul said, "You were dead in your trespasses and sin." ([Ephesians 2:1](#))

What makes us worthwhile with God? I can tell you what doesn't, and that's anything within you and me. We are worthwhile to God because of what GOD has done for us. Despite the fact that our sin had cursed us, God desperately wants us to come to Him.

In fact, to each and every one of us He has given a life, call it a time of grace, to come to Him. God has always said, "Hey, don't go cutting your own time of grace short, and certainly, don't be cutting the time of grace short for anybody else around you, because you ARE worthwhile to me."

This day of Pentecost, we are vividly reminded it is God's Holy Spirit that breathes the breath of faith into our nostrils when we learn about Jesus Christ as our Savior. The Holy Spirit breathes the power of Christ in us to make us alive whenever we hear the Word of God and how God describes to us the actions of drying up the bones of His one and only Son on that cross to give our dry bones life. Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit who uses that saving Gospel as one of His tools, His means of grace, for us to be saved.

The Holy Spirit also brought to bear that life of Jesus Christ for many of us already when we were infants; when those dry bones were plunged into the water of our baptism. Baptism is not water only but the very death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that the Holy Spirit brings to bear upon us. Baptism is another tool in the Holy Spirit's arsenal to bring us to faith. Baptism is another means of grace.

Could the Holy Spirit bring life to our dry bones more vividly than He does today, and will do today, in the body and blood of Jesus Christ, in the Lord's Supper. ***"This is my body given for you..."*** [\(Luke 22:19\)](#) ***"For this is My blood... shed for many for the remission of sins."*** [\(Matthew 26:28\)](#) "My life," Jesus says, "for your dry bones." It's the Great Exchange. The Holy Spirit breathed life into the dusty nostrils of the first man, Adam, and made him a living creature. Today, that same Holy Spirit literally thrusts the life of Jesus Christ down our throats and feeds us with God/Jesus Christ, our Savior Himself, that we remain alive with His life.

I don't know if you have any idea who Ray Harryhausen is. Ray Harryhausen was the special effects master who created the skeleton scene in the movie Jason and the Argonauts that so terrified me. This less than five minute clip of the movie took Ray Harryhausen over four and a half months to create as he carefully reanimated those skeletons frame by frame in a movie camera. Today, what 60+ years later, you can call up that movie clip of the skeletons in Jason and the Argonauts on YouTube. Quite frankly, it looks pretty clunky compared to today's computer-generated special effects. It exceeds anything that poor Ray Harryhausen could have ever done and in fact, being done in probably hours rather than months.

The Holy Spirit's work of creating faith is something that doesn't even take hours. It's something that can happen in an instant. It's sort of like being dead or not. You're either in faith or you're not. Scripture never talks about a process of being saved, of being halfway saved, or working yourself into a work-being saved. So many denominations and false-teaching churches out there have it so wrong. God declares you righteous at a breath, at a stroke of His Word full stop.

From the perspective of the unity of Scripture, it's nice to have an Old Testament text to celebrate the New Testament festival of Pentecost. It's appropriate because we recall that the method of God's saving work is the same whether it was in the Old Testament, whether it was in the New Testament, or whether it is in the year 2024. It's especially appropriate on Pentecost Sunday to be reminded that life is not really life until it is animated by God the Holy Spirit, who produces the faith we have in Jesus Christ. Truly a person is only a sack of dry bones until the Holy Spirit breaths the breath of life and faith into them and makes them newborn creatures. There would be no Christians, there would be no Christian church without that breath of life breathed into us by the Holy Spirit and in this Pentecost season, let us celebrate there is no bone of contention about it. Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.