

3/9/08

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Ezekiel 37:1-14

(The dry bones of death hear the Word of the Lord and live!)

1 The hand of the LORD was upon 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. 2 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. 3 He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know."

4 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! 5 This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. 6 I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'"

10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet-- a vast army.

11 Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' 12 Therefore prophecy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14 I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.'"

THE EPISTLE LESSON Romans 8:11-19

(Because God has given us the Spirit of Christ and of His resurrection, we live in hope today and eternally.)

11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. 12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation-- but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. 18 I consider that our present sufferings are not

worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

THE GOSPEL LESSON John 11:1-53

(The raising of Lazarus becomes the pretext for the authorities to call for Jesus' death as well as the promise of Jesus' own resurrection.)

Lay Minister: 1 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. 3 So the sisters sent word to Jesus,

People: "Lord, the one you love is sick."

Lay Minister: 4 When he heard this, Jesus said,

Pastor: "This sickness will not end in death. No, **it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.**"

Lay Minister: 5 Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. 7 Then he said to his disciples,

Pastor: "Let us go back to Judea."

People: 8 "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"

Pastor: 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. 10 It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light."

Lay Minister: 11 After he had said this, he went on to tell them,

Pastor: "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

Lay Minister: 12 His disciples replied,

People: "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better."

Lay Minister: 13 Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. 14 So then he told them plainly,

Pastor: "Lazarus is dead, 15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Lay Minister: 16 Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples,

People: "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Lay Minister: 17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18 Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, 19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

People: 21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

Lay Minister: 23 Jesus said to her,

Pastor: "Your brother will rise again."

Lay Minister: 24 Martha answered,

People: "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Lay Minister: 25 Jesus said to her,

Pastor: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

People: 27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

Lay Minister: 28 And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside.

People: "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you."

Lay Minister: 28 And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside.

People: "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you."

Lay Minister: 29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. 32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said,

People: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Lay Minister: 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

Pastor: 34 "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

People: "Come and see, Lord," they replied.

Lay Minister: 35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said,

People: "See how he loved him!"

Lay Minister: 37 But some of them said,

People: "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Lay Minister: 38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.

Pastor: 39 "Take away the stone," he said.

People: "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

Lay Minister: 40 Then Jesus said,

Pastor: "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

Lay Minister: 41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said,

Pastor: "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

Lay Minister: 43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice,

Pastor: "Lazarus, come out!"

Lay Minister: 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them,

Pastor: "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

Lay Minister: 45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

People: "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

Lay Minister: 49 Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up,

People: "You know nothing at all! 50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."

Lay Minister: 51 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. 53 So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. 21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

INTRO - Last night I went to Victory Bible Camp. Do you know that we have 21 people there right now for the All Alaska Youth Gathering?

While I was there they were telling stories. The youth acted out the story of Jonah running from God, being swallowed by a fish, and finally going to Ninevah. They told the story of the Good Samaritan helping a man beaten up. And then the youth worker from Fairbanks told a story of when she was a child and got in trouble and ran away. She found out about God's love and forgiveness through her parents.

Now, why would they need to tell story after story after story about God's love? They did it, because people don't learn the first time, they have to be told over and over again.

I. The last 3 weeks we have seen Jesus reach out to share the knowledge of God's love with someone who didn't know about Him. He reached out to Nicodemus, and to the woman at the well, and to the blind man. But today, he reaches out to Martha who already knew about His love. Why? We don't learn the first time.

A. Mary's brother Lazarus dies.

1. So, when Jesus arrives Martha first . . . well makes an observation. **Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died.**

2. But, then she expresses the faith she knew. **22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.**" You see, already Martha had faith. But still was going through a rough time.

B. So, Jesus talks to Martha, already a believer.

1. **"Your brother will rise again."**

2. Martha confesses her faith again, **"I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."**

3. She is saying what she believes, but she doesn't totally understand what God has planned, so Jesus gives her the bottom line, **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.**

4. And then comes the million dollar question for Martha, Jesus asks, **Do you believe this?"**

C. Why did Jesus need to teach Martha again and again? She already believed.

1. First, people don't always learn the first time.

2. And secondly, people need to be strengthened in their knowledge and trust, their faith in God.

3. Martha may have had a faith, but Jesus was giving her a chance to grow and stay in that faith. Do you believe this?

II. This week I not only saw our high Schoolers getting encouraged, I spent time with 11 8th grade confirmation students. They were working on their essays, and I asked some questions. In many ways they had the right thing to say, but, behind the right word were still some questions, some areas where they still needed more knowledge, maybe even some doubt.

A. Martha may have had some correct answers about Jesus, but, behind it, well did you hear the anger?

1. **Lord, If you'd been here my brother wouldn't have died.**

2. Yes there was faith, but there was also the possibility of anger leading to doubt, the danger of falling from faith.

B. So how about you?

1. When your brother dies, or maybe it's some other relative do you feel angry?

2. When you get ill DO YOU WONDER WHERE God'S love is?

3. Or when you give way to temptations that lead you away from Jesus, do you ever have doubt about his forgiveness, or feel confused? Do you ever get angry with God, or take it out on someone else?

C. Yes, you are believers, but you still need to be told again, so you know God loves you

III. Did you hear Jesus' question to Martha. Well, it's here for you too. **DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?**

A. Jesus is coming to you today.

1. Jesus shares his love with you, in the confession and forgiveness, in the songs that tell his love,

2. He shares love and knowledge in the Scripture reading, and benediction.

3. Yes, you may believe, but you also need strengthening, and assurance.

B. Today Jesus is also asking you this question, **Do you believe this?"**

CONCLUSION - So, last night the kids did a skit, and another skit, and the Fairbanks youth worker told the story, and then a lady from Anchorage told a story. She talked about being in a desperate time, and she prayed, and God answered. And guess what, with each story Jesus was assuring the youth that he loved them? Do you believe this? Today, God is assuring you of His love, and he asks, DO YOU BELIEVE THIS???