



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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May 27, 2012
The Festival of Pentecost
Sermon Text: [Ezekiel 37:1-14](#)
Pastor David Arndt

First Lesson: [Ezekiel 37:1-14](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 51b](#)
Second Lesson: [Acts 2:1-21](#)
Gospel Lesson: [John 14:25-27](#)

Do Not be Afraid; Stand and Prophecy

Dear Brothers and Sisters by virtue of the faith and the Savior that we share in Jesus Christ, our risen and ascended Lord:

They send guys like me and Pastor Ott to school for a good number of years to do the job that God gives us to do. Yet for all the book learning, for all the classes, for all the pieces of paper they give you to hang on a wall one day, what they can't really capture in those classes is what it feels like to serve God's people for 24 hours.

This past week I had one day in particular. You have to appreciate that I have a daughter graduating from Manitowoc Lutheran High School in a number of hours this afternoon. Guys...that means I have a list. Getting ready for graduation means I have a list. All that stuff that I thought I should be getting around to back when they were 12, now it's hitting me. It comes down to days and hours and minutes. So in the middle of that week where I've got at least one if not two lists, the phone starts to ring. Three times in a row on one particular morning I was called to three individual members' homes because they had found out that they were going to have to go on hospice. That means they were beginning to make arrangements for the end of their life. Not just one family, but three, in one morning. So you sit there with them as strangers come into their home and they measure bathrooms. They measure hallways. They screw in guardrails. They begin to make plans for the end. After awhile the sheer weight of it begins to hit you.

About the time I left the third home, the cell phone rang again. This time it was a parent like me with a child who is a senior in high school, only they had just gotten word that graduation wasn't going to happen. The mother wanted to know how to un-invite all the guests to whom they had already sent invitations. Mom was in tears. I'm a guy and by nature it means that when somebody shares a problem, I want to jump up, throw on a cape and fix things, but there's no fixing that kind of sorrow. There's no fixing that kind of feeling, that kind of emotion.

Then, about the time I left that family, I got another phone call from a member of our congregation who found out that she was going to have to lose an eye. She said, "Pastor, I really need someone to talk to." You add all three of those up, three people facing the end of their lives, a mom who is not just weakened but her relationship with her daughter was at risk, and then somebody else losing a body part; there comes a point where whether or not you've gone to school to wear one of these robes or not but

you look somebody in the eye and you go, “You know what? I don’t think I have anything left.” Somebody looks at you to share some kind of wisdom, some kind of comfort, some kind of word, and there can come a point in your life where you say to yourself, “You know what? I’ve had a long day. I’ve got nothing left!” If you’ve ever had a day like that, whether it was three of these, two of these, or one of these, if you’ve ever had a day where you look in the eyes of somebody who is hurting, somebody who is facing hopelessness, somebody who is facing an overwhelming sense of failure and inadequacy, it’s time to check your batteries, isn’t it?

The miracle of the Holy Spirit is what we get to gather around today. So whether you are preacher or ordinary folk, God reminds us that in the world out there, there is a lot of people facing a lot of stuff and that’s why God has us still living and breathing here. If God did not have work for us to do, you and I would already be enjoying his company. That’s the sinful yet powerful lesson God shared with his disciples on the day of Pentecost and years before that with the prophet named Ezekiel.

Ezekiel didn’t draw a lucky lot in life. Ezekiel’s job was to tell people a whole lot of messages they didn’t want to hear. So what God would often times do is use object lessons, much like we do with our kids and the adults in my church. They love the children’s sermons even more so than the regular ones. God treats Ezekiel to a children’s message of sort.

He walks him out and takes him by the power of the Holy Spirit to a valley filled with dried bones. Not just to take a look at those dry bones. The Bible says that God led Ezekiel back and forth through those dry bones, back and forth through those dry bones.

A number of weeks ago I believe there was a report that they found a whole bunch of bodies down in Mexico. A whole bunch of bodies that fell victim to the drug cartels down there. If you read the reports, the investigators said it was just a difficult thing to walk among the sights and the scene of so much violence and so much evil.

Ezekiel was treated to exactly the same thing. As God finally stood there with his prophet, God said to Ezekiel, “What do you think? Can these things live again? Can these bones live?”

Do you realize God steps into our lives just about every day and says the same thing? Do you read the newspaper? Do you listen to the people that talk to you? You don’t just stalk somebody on Facebook, but do you care enough to actually step into their lives and not just find out what’s going on and then back away as if you really don’t have the power to affect any kind of change? God points us to the hurting people in our lives today. God points us to hurting people we see when we look in the mirror and says, “Can these dry bones live?”

Getting ready for the graduation party, one of the items on my list was to make sure the grass was green. Silly item huh? My wife didn’t want it all trampled down and dead for

the rest of the summer, so I got out there and I watered. I fertilized. I killed those dandelions and pulled them. You know what? I was so busy and so proud of what I was doing that when the neighbor stopped to say, "Wow! Your lawn looks good." I stopped for a moment as I was spreading the fertilizer. Do you know what that does to a lawn to stop and talk to your neighbor for a moment while you are spreading fertilizer? I have this great big beautiful lawn, beautiful green and lush, and there's this spot about this big (2 feet) where I stopped with the fertilizer spreader. There it is! It turned yellow the very next day. So the very first thing you see when you walk in my back yard is deadness. There it is! The neighbor came over the next day and he said, "You know what? That ain't coming back."

That's what God taught Ezekiel that day. He said, "Take a look at these bones. Kick them around a little bit. You look at me and tell me with your human mind, can these bones live?" You and I appreciate that, don't we? You and I appreciate the lesson that God was teaching...that every single one of us are born in this world in hopelessness, like somebody stopped with the fertilizer spreader. There you and I sit, completely dead and completely incapable of ever resurrecting ourselves.

The difficulty about being a preacher is that I get to stand up in this pulpit long before I ever come out to Zion Morrison. A preacher writes his sermon and he writes it for himself. Then he sits there and stares at the Word that he is privileged to share with the world and he realizes that the Word accuses him of being nothing more than dead, nothing less than a miracle waiting to happen because a preacher sees first and foremost his own sins reflected in the Law, the deadness with which I was born. Then a preacher gets to stand among you, as fellow members in the family of God, and appreciate what you and I see every day we look in the mirror. The Scriptures tell us we were born dead in our trespasses and sins. Brittle, dry bones, incapable of anything. Yet a few moments ago, did you appreciate the miracle?

I wonder whether you realize sometimes why the preacher picks the words that he does with which to introduce the sermon. I don't know whether Pastor Ott tells you guys to stand up before the sermon or not, but I had you do that. Then I read this verse of the Bible to you. Ezekiel said, "So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, breath entered them. They came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army." Did you get the children's lesson? Every single one of us are woefully and painfully aware of our own sins. Every single one of us, our consciences accuse us to remind us why we ought never to have heard God say that he loved us. Every single one of us are painfully aware of how we are the dead patch of grass in the great big lawn of life. Yet a moment ago when the preacher said "Stand up. God wants to tell you something." Dry bones came together and you stood up.

You said "Lord, here I am. Speak to my heart. God, call me like you did for Adam in the Garden of Eden, the ruins of paradise, and fill me again, kindle in me the fire of your love." The army that Ezekiel talked about, that's you! You know what? Joy beyond joy, moms and dads, your sons and daughters stood up right along by your side, didn't they? And sons and daughters, your moms and dads stood up right by your side, didn't

they? Your moms and dads aren't perfect, nor are your sons and daughters perfect. By nature they are deserving to be and remain dead. Yet by the power of the Spirit, you and I stand today as a great army of the Lord. It's testimony of the power of the Holy Spirit still today.

Picture what happened for Ezekiel. There is Ezekiel looking out over this valley of dry bones, an object lesson to the woeful hopelessness that should have wrapped our hearts forever, and there they sit. Ezekiel and God. God says to Ezekiel, "Hey, do you think these bones can live?" Did you hear what Ezekiel said? He said, "God, you know." Try that with a teacher once. Next year when classes start again and they hand you out an algebra test and say, "Fill in this test." You say to the teacher, "You know all the answers. Take care of this for me." I'm sorry but it's not going to go over real well, is it?

Isn't that what Ezekiel did? God says, "Ezekiel, fill in the blank. Can these bones live?" Ezekiel said, "You fill in the blank. You're the only one that knows." Then God turns back to Ezekiel and says, "Ezekiel, son of man, open your mouth and prophesy."

Do you know what the word "prophesy" means? It means to simply take a message that somebody else gives you and communicate it. Share it. Did you hear what God did? There Ezekiel sits. There's a problem. A whole bunch of dead people. They are so dead they aren't ever coming back. God says "Can they live?" Ezekiel says "You handle it." God says "No. You. Open your mouth, son of man, and prophesy. You say in my name 'You bones, get up and live again.'" Do you understand the miracle of Pentecost? The miracle of Pentecost is born out every single time you and I stand up as the great army of believers, open our mouths, and God's Words come out.

Again, many of you recall that I'm about to preach for my daughter's graduation. I don't think I'll get through it. I cried like a baby when I baptized her. Odds are I'll have to choke back tears as I watch her walk up there and grab a diploma. But you know what? They didn't call me to stand up there and share my thoughts, feelings or opinions. They asked me to simply stand up there and prophesy. Open up the book and tell those graduates not what I think or feel they need to know but what God says they need to know. You know what I get the chance to tell them? I'll stand in front of them and say "Don't you ever be afraid."

"Don't you ever be afraid." It's the same thing Jesus told his disciples. He said, "You know what? I'm leaving. I'm out of here. I'll send the Holy Spirit, but don't you ever be afraid, because you know not just the message that God spoke to your heart. You know the message that God gave you to give and to share with the world."

In this house, God fills the hearts of his people with promises. You and I drag ourselves into worship some Sunday mornings fresh out of battle in a sin-stricken world. If your lives are like mine and you count back the stories, the struggles, the woes of the people around you, sometimes it's all that you and I can do to look up in heaven and say "Lord, I got nothing anymore. I got nothing to share with them by way of advice."

Then that Lord clears his throat and says “Remember, it was never about your thoughts, feelings or opinions? It was about you prophesying. It was about you opening your mouth and sharing what I would have you share with the world.”

That’s how you and I celebrate today. God brought Ezekiel to a valley filled with dry bones. God said, “Let’s get this straight. You’re my prophet. I send you out into the world because I still have work for you to do. That work is to simply do this—step up in the lives of the people that you love, open your mouth and let my truth come forth.”

Who will you bump into this coming week? What sad tale of sorrow or distress are you going to hear? And even more so, what will your reaction be? I get a kick out of Facebook. I have a whole bunch of people in my congregation that will tell me about all the bad stuff going on in somebody else’s life. I’ll say, “What did you do about it?” They said, “Well, I logged out. I went on somebody’s wall and I listened to all the struggles. I saw the pictures. I heard the tears. Then I logged off. I logged out.”

God walks us among every single day of our lives a valley of dry bones, people who look out in their future and they see nothing but hopelessness. They say “You know what? There are so many pieces to my life, there’s no way they are ever coming back together again!” But did you hear the experiences of the prophet named Ezekiel? Ezekiel said, “You know what? I did just as God told me to. I prophesied, and as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound. The bones came together, bone to bone. I looked. Tendons. Flesh appeared on them. Skin covered them. There was no breath, so I prophesied some more and the breath came. They stood up—a vast and powerful army.”

You’ve got the power to put pieces together this coming week. You’ve got the power to pull together the pieces and the puzzles of people’s lives. It starts by simply standing up and confessing to your God that in the past sometimes you were content to have him fill in the blanks. God walks among us and says “Will the pieces of the troubled peoples’ lives with whom you and I come in contact, will they ever come back together again?” You and I turn back to God and say “God, that’s your business. You know.” And to each of our hearts, God speaks this Word today. He says, “No, this is Pentecost. You prophesy. Open your mouth and share from your heart your personal appreciation for the promises that reassured not just you but the world that there’s never reason to be afraid.”

God promises to protect and watch over his people. God loves his people to this extent that by his power and spirit alone he gathers us together week after week into a great vast army of believers to head out into that world and share the confidence that God’s people alone can share. That’s your celebration today. That’s your privilege as the people of God.

As you stand in just a moment with your sons and daughters, your moms and dads, your grandmas and grandpas, and appreciate the power of Pentecost, what was dead and by human understanding should never have come together has, remember you

and I stand as a family in the armies of God. God now wants to send us out even as he did those Galilean uneducated fishermen so people might hear with words and actions they can understand... that our God is great, powerful, good, loving and he loves them just as much as he loves us. May that peace that passes all this world's understanding... the power and the promise of Pentecost, and again the Word, the assignment and the encouragement that God spoke not just to Ezekiel and not just to the Twelve but to every single one of us each day; on this mighty day of Pentecost, God says, "You! Get out there and prophesy. Open your mouth and share the promises that have the power to bring not just peoples' forever back together, but their lives in the process"... may that peace that passes all our understanding keep our hearts and minds. Amen.