

The Lord and Giver of Life

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Pentecost / Holy Spirit; Confirmation; Life; Pentecost; Valley of Dry Bones / Ezekiel 37:1–14; Psalm 139:1–12; Psalm 139:13–16; Acts 2:1–21; John 15:26–27; John 16:4b–15

- › To Kailynn, Alex, Owen, Maddie, and Wyatt, Family, friends, members of Salem Lutheran Church. Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is not just Confirmation Sunday. Today is not just about cake and a certificate and robes and perhaps a party and gifts. Today has the look and feel of a Graduation. Today is the continuation of a lifelong process. Today is also the Festival of Pentecost which many call the Birthday of the Church, but was really a continuation of what was started at creation, and we are celebrating what we confess in the Nicene Creed: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life.” The very Spirit who hovered over the face of the waters, bringing creation out of chaos as God spoke the universe into existence, is the same Spirit that Jesus calls the Comforter or Helper, whom he breathed on his disciples on the evening of resurrection Sunday, giving them joy and peace in the forgiveness of their sins. He is the same Spirit poured out fifty days later to the Jews from every nation, bringing them to repentance and faith in the crucified and risen Savior. There, on that first Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out, and through preaching and Baptism, the Father creates a new Israel for himself, as those who were so dead in trespasses and sins that they killed their Christ by nailing him to a tree are brought to life in his name.

In Ezekiel’s Pentecost, there was a rattling of dry bones as God’s Spirit proceeded to reconnect bone to bone. In [Acts 2](#), we are told of the Spirit who, like a rushing wind, rattled through the house in Jerusalem where the disciples were. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the apostle Peter did what Ezekiel did. He preached, and through Peter’s preaching of Christ crucified, the spiritually dead were raised to life with God through faith in Christ Jesus. Our Old Testament Reading for this Pentecost Sunday provides us with a picture of how indeed

The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of Life.

To you confirmands and the rest of you gathered here today or listening online or over the phone, Life without the Spirit is only bones. Bones bleached and bare are about as devoid of life as you can get. The picture of a skull and crossbones is a symbol for poison. The symbol of a skull or the sketch of a skeleton at Halloween reminds us of the stark reality of death. Halloween also makes fun of death. There is nothing fun about it.

Lifeless bones are all that is left over once death and decay have had their way. There is no hope for a resuscitation of bones. They are a grim reminder of a life that was but can never be again. In our garden over the last number of years we have been finding bones of some tiny rodent which shows us the reality of death. Instead of rodents, Ezekiel in his vision saw a nation of skeletons, the remains of those that were slain. This is the whole house of Israel overcome and butchered by her enemies. They are dead under God's judgment and wrath.

As it was for Israel, so it is for you as well. When human beings go there on way, there is only death, and that includes you as well. Recall the Garden of Eden: God's solemn word to Adam proved true: "In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." In the letter to the Romans Paul tells us that through Adam's sin, we inherit also his death. We know it's true. We've lost loved ones to death and we can't avoid that our day is coming!

Humanity then is reduced to an army of spiritual skeletons far more vast than Ezekiel's valley of dry bones, for the whole world is rendered dead in trespasses and sin. Without the Lord and Giver of Life, we are left dead in our sins. The outcome of this death is hell itself.

This is the danger that we all have. As sinners we are in the danger of being dried up bones. The temptation to walk away is out there and I have seen it time and time again. That after today, you aren't in church, that you aren't getting the refreshment and renewal of the breath of God each week. When we are away from food and water, our body dies. When we are away from our spiritual and life giving food and drink our spiritual body dies, our hearts become hardened. I get it, I've been there. In my early days of college as a Pre-Seminary student, what did I neglect on Sundays...the Divine Service. My sleep was more important to me and to find a local congregation to worship at didn't really interest me. Yeah, I had chapel each day and the Lord's Supper once a week, but it wasn't the same as gathering together with the faithful on Sundays. There were points in those first months of college that I was becoming very thirsty. It happens and the danger is there. Luckily I repented and I did find a home church away from home. I had friends and professors that encouraged me to go and I was becoming refreshed!

Because where the Lord's Word is, there His Spirit gives life in his name. There is life even in the Valley of Dry Bones—in the death of Christ! There is an old Reformation altarpiece that depicts the cross of Christ erected over Adam's skull with blood dripping down on the cranium. The artist wanted to portray the truth that the blood Christ brings life to Adam and his descendants.

This, of course, is the Gospel. Christ shed his blood to redeem us from sin, to rescue us from the devil, and to restore us to life with God.

Where Christ's promises are trusted, sinners have what they declare: forgiveness, life, and salvation. St. Paul writes to the Church in Rome: "Faith come from hearing, and hearing

through the Word of Christ.” I experienced that greatly after having come back into the Lord’s House. And the Words of Ezekiel carried the Spirit, who brought life to the corpses. In our Reading from Acts we hear Peter’s words carrying the Spirit, who brought life to those gathered on that first Pentecost Day.

Jesus’ words are “Spirit and truth” and these words bring life to you in the forgiveness of sins. You hear it when I speak to you: “As a called and ordained servant of Christ and by His Authority, I forgive you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” These words of Absolution carry within it the power of the resurrection of the dead. These words within it same power that Ezekiel’s Words did over the Valley of Dry Bones. These words are words of life for you!

The Spirit brings you to life with God now and forever. Ezekiel’s Spirit-filled words brought bones to life, but Jesus’ words of “spirit and life” do something even greater. God used Ezekiel to the impossible: through his preaching, the Spirit worked to restore life to Israel to life.

God uses Jesus’ words—the words proclaimed into your ears even as you hear this Sermon—to give you eternal life.

This is a gospel. This is good news. The Spirit gives life. And parents, grandparents, guardians, other family and even members of Salem, you have a job to do for these five catechumens today. You have a job to make sure they are here: hearing the Words of Life. You have a job to continue to point out that this isn’t the end, this is merely a continuation of their life of faith which began at their baptism. Where the Word is preached there is life. I encourage you to do your job, I’ll support you and I’ll encourage you as well.

Dear Church, Every Baptism in the name of the Triune God, every Gospel delivering sermon and really every time we receive our Lord’s Body and Blood is a continuation of Pentecost. God’s Word and Spirit cannot be separated. The Spirit works through the Word to bring sinners to faith. That’s why it is so import to be here and to hear God’s Word - read and proclaimed and to be involved in the study of His Word!

The miracle of Ezekiel’s vision is magnified on that first Pentecost and it continues in our midst today as God pours out the Spirit, on you and even on you Kailynn, Owen, Alex, Maddie, and Wyatt. It’s through the Spirit that Christ is brought to you and us to Christ in the waters of Holy Baptism, which is the faith that you will soon confess and make bold promises! At your baptism, there was a new creation. Today, that new creation is confirmed.

We learn from Luther’s Small Catechism that we cannot believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him by our own reason or strength, but the Holy Spirit called us by the Gospel. NO more than the disconnected and dried-out bones could pull themselves together and regain life could we walk out of the living death of sin into life with God. The Lord and giver of life

has accomplished the impossible. He has brought you to faith in Christ Jesus. That's why we celebrate Pentecost as the culmination of Easter Season. So we say it again, *Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!* In his resurrection life that the Lord and giver of life bestows on you, calling nonexistent faith into being that you might have life with the Father now and forever. Pentecost is not just a culmination of Easter, it's the continuation of the life of the church.

Kailynn, Owen, Alex, Maddie, and Wyatt, if there is one thing that I want you to take from today is this...Pentecost isn't just the ending, it's a continuation of life and Confirmation today isn't just the end of something, it's really a continuation of life, life within the Church and the beginning of something special for you where you along with us will receive Christ's body and blood for the first time. What a joy that is for you. And Remember also, God in your Baptism did a miracle, he took dried up bones and made them living bones. He continues to liven up your bones that through the Word read and proclaimed, the Absolution proclaimed, the Lord's Supper Received.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.