

Have you ever felt like a "bag of bones"—lifeless, empty, alone? Today's Old Testament lesson tells us a story about dry bones. But it's also a story about how we can be made alive again by God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can revive you daily. He can resurrect you daily. Does that sound like something you want?

This word from the prophet Ezekiel is actually a prophetic vision of how God will resurrect the children of Israel from a grave of bondage to the Babylonian people. Notice how this dramatic scene builds up. God takes Ezekiel to the middle of a valley covered with bones. They are dry. They've been there a long time. Into this scene of utter hopelessness, God speaks a word of hope. He promises that His people will rise again. But this resurrection will happen only by the Word of the Lord, by the power of God speaking it into existence.

The Lord can do the same in your life today. But sometimes it is so hard for us to see.

A man lies on a hospital bed. "I feel so useless," he says. "I feel cut off from reality here." Do you feel like that man? A woman says, "My children are grown. My husband has his work. I spend many hours alone. What's the purpose of my life now?" Are you that woman?

A young person says, "I'm not sure who I am, or what to do with my life. Where am I going? Do my friends really like me, or do they just say they do? Do you feel like that?"

A parent says, "I have no time for myself. Life is the same thing day after day. I had such different hopes and dreams for the future. My life is busy, but empty." Can you relate? Are you a bag of bones—dry, lifeless, dead inside? Are you cut off from life as it was meant to be?

God's Word has an answer for these things. God's Word tells you and me that it is time to repent, time to "get real" with God. It is time to admit that we have failed to see God as our source of life. We have failed to trust in Him more than we trust ourselves. We have failed to use the power He has given us. And we have failed to really believe that Jesus will raise our dry bones on the Last Day.

I am convinced that this is our greatest problem. We'd rather do things our way and stay dry and lifeless, than humble ourselves, repent, and do things God's way.

Nevertheless, God promises, "Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41: 10). God is discoverable. He wants you to be open to Him. He wants to turn your dry bones into living flesh. How does that take place?

It takes place when we make use of God's Word. A little girl once picked up a dust-covered Bible sitting on the coffee table. "Mommy, whose book is this?" she asked. "Oh, it's God's book," the mother said in very religious tones. "Well," the girl replied, "we'd better send it back to Him, because we're sure not using it."

Maybe we ought to start leaving our Bibles open at home. That way we might actually be inclined to pick it up and start reading. Or if that's not your style, there are countless audio Bibles that you can listen to just about anywhere. The point is, you have to find a way to feed yourself God's Word. It is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). It puts spiritual muscle on your bones and breathes joy into an otherwise sagging spirit. But it's not going to happen magically—you've got to pick it up and do it. It's like preparing a good meal. There's some work and preparation involved because the food is not just going to show up on your plate fully cooked. But as you start the process, you learn to enjoy it, especially when you get to enjoy the final product. If that is true of the food that comes out of your kitchen, it's even more true of the spiritual food that comes out of the Bible, and that's the food that gives and sustains a life of faith.

The Holy Spirit turns dry bones into living flesh when you remember what God did for you in Holy Baptism. You may not be able to remember your baptism—I sure don't—but remembering that you are baptized can make all the difference in the world. Baptism established your identity with God. It forged a powerful link between you and Jesus, and He now shares everything with you. His suffering and death; His resurrection and victorious life all apply to you, and baptism created that bond. What better thing to revive dry bones than promises of baptism?

And still, there's more. The Holy Spirit resurrects dry bones when we gather around the table of our Lord Jesus. Jesus hosts a meal that breathes life into our souls. With the bread and the wine, His suffering and death on the cross reaches through time and touches you, forgiving you completely of your sins. Knowing what is offered here in the Lord's Supper, how could we possibly stay away?

Years ago, a ship on the Atlantic was in distress because its supply of fresh water had run out. The crew started to imagine a horrible death from dehydration, ironically with water all around them. When hope was almost gone, they saw a ship approaching them. At once they hoisted distress signals. But the answer they got back was, "Dip it up."

"Dip it up?" Was that some kind of sick joke? They signaled again and got the same answer. Finally, in despair, they lowered a bucket. To their amazement and joy, the water turned out to be fresh water. The sailors had overlooked the fact that they were at the mouth of the Amazon River, whose fresh water flows far out to sea.

God's fresh water is always there in His Word. It is always there in Baptism's power. It is always there with the bread and the wine of Holy Communion. Why despair? Dip it up! Fill your bucket! Isn't that what we're doing here? Isn't that why Jesus established a thing called church on earth? We're here because this is where Jesus fills your bucket. This is the mouth of the river of God's fresh forgiveness and mercy. And we need it, so badly. We need to keep dipping it up until the time when all of God's promises come true.

We have a picture of that time in Ezekiel's vision; a time when dead bones will rise from their graves; a time when the power of Jesus' resurrection will sweep through every cemetery and mausoleum, uniting souls with bodies again; a time that goes beyond time, in which God's faithful people will enjoy His new creation without end. We get closer to that time with each passing day. By God's gracious choice and the actions taken by Jesus, you will be included in this forever life.

Your bones need not be dry. The Spirit of God is here. This is the mouth of the river—the source of forever life with Jesus. Get your bucket ready.