

As prophetic visions go, this is one of the strangest and most dramatic in Scripture. It's a vision of how God will resurrect the children of Israel from a grave of bondage to the Babylonian people. Notice how the scene builds up. God takes Ezekiel to the middle of a valley covered with bones. They are dry because they have been there a long time. In this scene of utter hopelessness, God speaks 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. And then He does, and the bones begin to rise.

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 seems to have his own interests. 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? Who can I trust? 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." Sound familiar?

Can you relate to the valley of bones glimpsed by Ezekiel? Are you cut off from life as it was meant to be?

God's Word has answer for these things, and the answer is both simple and hard. God's Word tells you and me that it is time to repent, time to stop playing at spirituality, time to return to the Lord. 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 supplies He has given us. And we have failed to really believe that Jesus will raise our bones on the Last Day.

I am convinced that this is our greatest problem. We go through the motions of repentance, but our hearts aren't in it, nor do we faithfully drink the living water He pours out for us.

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 to turn our dry bones into living flesh. How does that take place?

It takes place when we make use of God's Word. 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 our 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 and gain experience, you learn to enjoy it, especially when you get to savor 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 we remember what God did for us 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 to revive dry bones than the water and promise of baptism?

And still there's more. The Holy Spirit gives life to dry bones when we gather around the table of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the host as well as the meal that breathes life into our souls. With the bread and the wine, you and I are given the body and blood of Jesus. His suffering and death on the cross reaches through time and touches us, forgiving us completely of our 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, "Bring it up."

"Bring 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, living water is always there in His Word. It is always there in what Baptism did for you. It is always there with the bread and the wine of Holy Communion. Why do we despair? Bring it up! Fill your bucket! That's what we're doing here. That's why Jesus established His 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 bringing 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.

So get ready. Get your bucket. 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. Bring it up!

