

The Fifth Sunday in Lent
March 26, 2023

““No condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, who walk according to the Spirit!”
(Romans 8:1-4)

By Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 5th Sunday in Lent is from our Epistle reading Romans 8:1-4.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

Here ends our text.

What common theme do you see from our three readings of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel? The theme of death and life is very vivid, isn't it? Ezekiel 37 gives us the picture of a valley full of dry bones. When our minds envision that, the only word that can describe that is – death. There's no life there, just dusty, dry bones. God told us who these bones represent. Israel – unrepentant, unbelieving Israel, who's hearts were dried up, dusty and dead.

And then in John 11, we don't have a picture representing death, but death itself. We have the story of the death of Lazarus. Jesus was told that His dear friend was sick. Jesus delayed and Lazarus died before He arrived. He was in the tomb for 4 days. Real death, real decomposition had begun. Jesus told the people to remove the stone that covered the tomb and Martha was quick to say that you don't want to do that. You're not going to be smelling roses.

We began the season of Lent as always with ashes on our foreheads. The dustiness of our sin which reminds us of our mortality – our death. From dust you are and to dust you shall return. That's real. And God doesn't try to sugar coat death, does He. He wants us to see it, truly see the dry bones, truly see Lazarus in the tomb for

4 days. And then recognize that what we see in God's Word is true about all of us. We will return to dust.

Our Psalm today, Psalm 130, gives voice to our dire predicament.

**“Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord;
2 Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive
To the voice of my supplications. 3 If You, Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?”**

Why is our predicament so dire? Because of our complete inability to make our dry bones come alive again – because of our complete inability to walk out of the tomb after 4 days alive again. It's not ever going to happen by your power or mine. Last week we heard the blind man say that it was unheard of since the beginning of time for someone born blind to receive his sight. Unheard of. Complete inability to give yourself sight. Much less can a dead person cause his or her own body to come back alive.

And that's why God uses dry bones to remind us of our mortality. That's why Jesus delayed in coming to Mary and Martha. He puts death in all of its ugliness on full display. And that cause us to cry out of the depths to the Lord. For we are helpless and unable to change our lot.

Psalm 130 gives to us the reason why we cannot stand on our own, doesn't it. Because of the Lord should mark iniquities, sins that is, our bones stay dry. We stay in the tomb.

But, I began this message by saying that there are two themes in our readings, two themes in the whole Bible. Not just death – but life. And Psalm 130 comes to our rescue with the Word of life from God.

**“But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared.
5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope.”**

There is hope in the forgiveness that comes from God. In Him alone is there forgiveness. So that my soul, your soul, waits on God's Word of hope. There is awe at what God alone can do. And our Epistle reading gives us the “how”, doesn't it. It tells us how there is life and forgiveness for all sinners.

You know the answer of how God can graciously forgive, don't you? Let me read the first verse of our epistle again.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus”.

No condemnation. None whatsoever! Not for one of your sins. For all of your sins have been forgiven. How? Through Christ Jesus. For all you are in Christ Jesus, death no longer reigns, but there is life. The ashes of Ash Wednesday are placed on your forehead in the form of a cross. For that is how your forgiveness was won.

And how is it given to you? By the Holy Spirit!

“2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.”

The law as perfect and as beautiful as it is, cannot help you. It does not set you free, but condemns you to death because of the sinful flesh that is in all of us. Paul lamented in the previous chapter of Romans, Romans 7:

“23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

The law makes us captive, takes us prisoner because we are guilty of not fulfilling it. Paul cries out that he is helpless, unable to be delivered from his body of death! Who can help me? Paul gives the answer, the only answer!

25 I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Jesus freed us! How? Paul gives us the details.

3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

In Christ's flesh, sin was condemned. What we couldn't accomplish, God did. He sent His Son to take on our flesh. His flesh was perfect, without sin. But He took

all our sins upon Himself that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled. In who? In us!!! Jesus died on the cross – a condemned sinner. We live as free, without condemnation, with His Spirit in us. We have been given a new Spirit of life.

And so as vivid as the picture of death was in Ezequiel 37 and in John 11, so much more vivid is the picture of life.

“there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them.

9 Also He said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” ’ ” 10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.” (Ezekiel 37)

He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” 44 And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.” (John 11)

Life to the people of Israel – the Spirit of God living in them through His prophesied Word. Life to Lazarus! He who is the Word spoke and death must obey. For Jesus alone has authority over death!

But, you and me? What does God’s Word prophesy to you and me? I’m glad you asked. For Paul doesn’t leave us wondering. The final verse of our epistle, verse 11, tells us:

11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”

He who was condemned, Jesus Himself, didn’t remain dead. Listen to the glorious work of the Trinity. But if the Holy Spirit of Him, that is God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead, God the Son, dwells in you...then He, God the Father, who raised Christ from the dead, will also give life to your mortal bodies, again through the same Spirit who dwells in you.

Dear friends in Christ, you have life even now by the indwelling of the Spirit, have the sure promise of eternal life for your mortal bodies at the final resurrection!

There won't be any rattling of bones, but in a blink of an eye your mortal bodies will be made alive. Christ will call you forth from the tomb and you will obey and live with Him for all eternity. For in Christ there is no condemnation.

Who has believed this report? Isaiah 53 asked? Many of the Jews who saw Jesus raise the Lazarus from the dead believed in Jesus. The Pharisees however sought even more to kill Jesus so that He could no longer walk openly among them.

God's word is given to you this day so that you may believe by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in you these most beautiful words that Jesus told Martha.

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

And so she responded, and we also confessed our faith in the words of the Apostles Creed.

27 She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)