



*I will put My Spirit
in you and you
will live.*

Ezekiel 37:14

My grandfather grew up going to a church building in the countryside: one of those that back in the good ‘ole days, no matter how distant it was from any sort of dense population, the good ‘ole German-background Lutherans made their essential trek not just on Sundays, but for other fellowship opportunities during the week as well. The church served as their community center, with next to nothing else around them. However, this church building also had something else on the grounds. Surrounding both sides of the sanctuary, and behind the altar up front, if you ever looked out the windows, the grass was overrun by gravestones. I remember going there for the first time, and thinking how weird it was to have a cemetery right outside the place where people not only sang hymns of praise, but had the usual casseroles and Jell-O and laughter mixed in down in the fellowship hall. How weird it was to have death right outside the door with all the life being shared inside!

Unfortunately, as has been the case in recent decades for many rural congregations throughout this country and beyond, that particular worship community is no longer in operation, as it has closed down altogether. Those members must now go into town for the next closest Lutheran opportunity. And even though those halls and classrooms and sanctuary are no longer over-run with laughter and warm embraces, the cemetery with plenty of gravestones still stands. And, as the years go by, more of those people buried in that still holy ground are no longer known by the living, miles upon miles away from them.

I think of such lesser-trafficked final resting places scattered throughout America and all over the world whenever this Ezekiel passage comes up that we heard this morning. It has become one of my favorite portions of Scripture, and not because of the song “Dem Bones Gonna Rise Again,” that I’m sure was taught inside that rural church building at many points over its history. Instead, this prophecy serves as a reminder that on this Pentecost Sunday, the Holy Spirit is not reserved for those who are active members of faith communities, whether it be the disciples long ago, or those who go through the usual baptism and Confirmation and weddings and everything else inside a church building. No, the Holy Spirit will even reach those who are down in the dumps, those who wonder if they are worth any care or concern anymore, even those in death itself.

At some point down the line, I remember walking past one of the gravestones there, and the inscription included the same last name as mine. I wasn’t so sure if he was any relation at all, since *Ross* is not an overly unique family name in the grand scheme of things. Recently, however, we had a genealogy put together. It turns out Johann Adam Ross was the one who started the whole farming thing for our family on this side of the pond, after he and his wife, Anna, immigrated to northwest Ohio from Germany back in 1848. Come 1885, both had a gravestone in that cemetery to mark the end of their life in this earthly realm of things, at least. They are just two among the scores of saints in that cemetery, all of whom come with a story, a story that cannot possibly be fit on a stone or in a genealogy report.

We know of such incredibly precious stories for our own family and friends: stories we wish we could tell *ad nauseum* to ensure that future generations never forget the people who now lie resting in peace. And yet, on this Pentecost Sunday, we know the Holy Spirit is not reserved for the living, but for the dead we still love as well, and even for those who have been long forgotten by us, because this God of everlasting life refuses to ever stop caring for them for all eternity.

“Can these bones live?” The question doesn’t just come from God to Ezekiel, but it is asked by many who walk among the gravestones all over this Creation. And it is in that brutally honest and most basic human curiosity that God sets the stage for the Holy Spirit to kick it up a notch. It was the same brutally honest question that was asked by the disciples after their Lord endured the cross and was buried in his own haunting grave as well.

It was in their pain and anguish that the Holy Spirit responded with a Resurrection to alter our collective human story, not just for the disciples then, but for all of God’s children for the countless generations to come. It is that same Holy Spirit that not only empowers disciples of all times to serve with bold compassion for those in need, but there’s evidently more than enough Holy Spirit to carry us from death into the ultimate banquet hall of joy and laughter that will put all our beloved Lutheran fellowship halls to shame. And so, on this Pentecost Sunday, we give thanks for the Holy Spirit that was set loose into our hearts, remaining active throughout this life here, and showing us the way to the holy hall of eternal life. For that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen.