

SERMON FOR MARCH 29, 2020

TEXT: EZEKIEL 37:11-14

THEME: WHEN ALL HOPE IS LOST

<sup>11</sup> Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' <sup>12</sup> Therefore prophesy, and say to them, thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup> And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord."

In the name of Jesus:

You know the old saying that refers to the weather in March, that March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb? The reasoning behind this saying is that typically the weather in March straddles winter and spring. The harsh winter weather is more typical of early March, while the mild onset of spring is true near the end of March. But where I grew up, in Cleveland, the opposite was usually true, in that if the March weather was mild, then we would pay for it by having winter weather at the end of the month. In light of the turmoil and distress that we have all seen and felt with the coronavirus, I think it is safe to say that March came in like a lamb, is and going out like a lion.

Just a few weeks ago we were able to go on with our lives in freedom, the first Sunday of March saw our youth group have a youth get together at a bowling alley. We were able to assemble in church for worship, go to the library, visit the sick and shut in at hospitals and nursing homes. We gathered together and shopped without fear of not having enough. But now, our world and our lives are turned upside down. As the Governor has issued a stay at home order, and with that only essential business can remain home, we have seen that we are now living a new normal. There is a run on toilet paper, grocery shelves are fully stocked and quickly emptied, tempers are short and anxieties are high. We now live as if we are imprisoned in our own homes. And rightly so, for this is a dangerous pandemic. As Christians, in keeping with the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment we honor and obey the law of our government. We seek to show our love for God by loving our neighbor, and that love is shown as we wash our hands, stay at home to work, and practice social distancing. It is a new normal. It is good that we do this, but to be honest, it is upsetting.

The Bible says in the book of Ecclesiastes that there is nothing new under the sun. You may be hearing me say this a lot over the next few weeks and months. And it is true! There is nothing new under the

sun, and those who have gone before us have experienced what we are experiencing and going through. Just look at the Old Testament lesson for today in Ezekiel 37.

The people who lived in Ezekiel's time would think that we have it easy today. We are told to stay at home to be safe. For them, their lives were uprooted and they lived in turmoil. The time is 587 BC, and God's people have been displaced. They were uprooted from their homeland and taken to a place that they did not know, Babylon. Their homes were destroyed and the people were prisoners in another land. They didn't have a stay at home order to follow; they had instead a stay in a far away place to follow. They didn't have any say in the matter. They were captured, dragged away, not knowing when they would return. God then revealed to them through the prophet Jeremiah that they should plan to stay there for a while. Jeremiah writes: <sup>4</sup> "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup> Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. <sup>6</sup> Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. <sup>7</sup> But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you

into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. “ They weren’t leaving anytime soon, for 70 years to be exact. Why was God doing this, what was His plan?

What God wants is for all people to repent. To look in the mirror of God’s law and see that they have sinned against God. David could have made excuses as to why he broke the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment with Bathsheba, as to why he broke the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment when he murdered Uriah and tried to hide it. But he didn’t, David recognized that God would accept no excuse. That is why David writes in Psalm 51: “Against you, you only have I sinned and done this evil in your sight.” David came clean before God. He had too. God knows all and looks into the heart. David couldn’t lie to God. He confessed his sin, and God forgave and restored him.

This is what God through the prophet Ezekiel is telling those in exile. Repent. Turn to God. Ask Him for forgiveness. God will look upon the humble, God will forgive their sins and deal with their shame and God will put His Spirit within them. God is going to do something new and something spectacular.

Note what God says and does. The hand of the Lord was upon Ezekiel, and by the power of the Holy Spirit God brought him in the

middle of a valley that was filled with dry, lifeless, dead bones. God asks Ezekiel a question: Can these bones live? Ezekiel replies: O Lord God, you know. The Lord then tells Ezekiel to preach the Word, telling them that by the power of the Word of God these dead bones will come alive. Then, by the power of the Word of God the Holy Spirit breathes into these bones, giving them not only breath, but muscle and skin and flesh and color. The dead comes to life by the power of God's Word. God brings life to the dead by the power of His Spirit working through His Word, so much so that Ezekiel is able to foresee that God will do this and is doing this not just in the Valley of Dry Bones but He give life to the world by the power of His Word.

To the human eye, this seems nuts. These are dead bones, no ears, no eyes or mouth, no life, no flesh, but God's Word cannot be bound or boxed in. When God speaks things happen. He did it before in the Garden, where God formed man from a lump of clay and breathed into him the breath of life and man became a living being.

A half a century later, God decided to come down to be with His people. He was born of a Virgin. He went about the cities and villages proclaiming that God was in charge. To show that God was indeed in charge, through His Son Jesus God gave sight to the blind, made the deaf

ear, and He even raised Lazarus, among others from the dead. Jesus Christ came into this world not to condemn the world but to save the world, to give life to many. Jesus was crucified on a cross, rejected by the very people He came to save. His lifeless body was laid in a tomb. And you know the rest of the story, don't you? The dead Jesus came alive again and lives and reigns to all eternity.

You look at your situation and the situation that we find the world in today and you may be thinking and saying: "What's the use?" The economy is going in the tank, people are losing their jobs, people are sick and dying, the world and society, as we know it seems to be dying. Hopelessness abounds. All seems to be lost. Anxiety is on the rise and people are in despair. The world is seemingly going to hell in a hand basket.

But God tells us through the prophet Ezekiel that all hope is not lost. In fact, in God we have hope. He is our only Hope in this time of need. God has not forsaken us. He is with us. Jesus is called Emanuel for that very reason, God is with us. He knows our suffering and pain. Jesus experienced it all. For you and for me. God forgives you all of your sins in Jesus. He gives you new life by the power of His Spirit, working in and through His Word. Even in this time, when we are

seemingly at our wits end, suffering in the midst of this pandemic, Jesus speaks to us His Word of love and forgiveness. He says do not be afraid. He has lived, died and He rose again for you. He lives for you. He gives you new life in Him by the power of His Word and by the power of your Baptism. He breathes into your heart and life His Spirit. He hasn't forgotten you. He will never leave you nor forsake you, so not you can live with confidence in Jesus. The Lord is your Helper in your time of trouble. Turn to Him in His Word. Listen to His Words of life in Jesus. He gives you new life by the power of His Word, His love giving you life, so that you can live your life in love for others. All hope is not lost, for God is continuing to work through His Word to bring about His will for you and others. For God says: "And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord." Amen