

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Pentecost B  
May 23, 2021  
Ezekiel 37:1-14; Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

## The Language of Life

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13-15 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

Fifty days after celebrating our Lord's resurrection from the dead, we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, a day when we pay special attention to the person and work of the Holy Spirit. And as we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we see that the Holy Spirit is all about proclaiming Jesus as Savior and Lord. If God's prophets, Jesus' apostles, Jesus' preachers don't speak God's Word, and especially the Word of Christ crucified and risen for sinners, then their preaching is not from the Holy Spirit. For Jesus Himself said, "when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me." (John 15:26). And this is how the Spirit gives life.

And, oh, how we need that life. For we are like those bones Ezekiel saw in the valley. We are nothing but dead, dry bones. According to our natural, fallen, sinful nature, we have no life in us at all. We were spiritually dead, and that leads to physical death and eternal damnation. That's what sin does to us. It kills us and leaves us for dead, even as it did for Israel. Israel had gone her own way, ignoring God's Word and will for her. She had ignored the prophets God had sent repeatedly to call her back to Him in repentance. He wanted them to have life, and that in abundance, but they would not listen. There was no hope for them.

Until God sent Ezekiel. When asked if these dry, lifeless bones can live, Ezekiel doesn't say, "Are you kidding me? These bones are dead and dry and beyond hope. How can you possibly ask if these bones can live?" Instead, He answers, "O Lord GOD, you know." (Ezek. 37:3). Then God said, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 5 Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. . . . Prophesy 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." (Ezek. 37:4-5, 9). And live they did! Those bones came together, were covered in flesh, and were raised to life. That breath, that Spirit is the Holy Spirit who brought those dead bones to life.

We see something similar in today's second reading. When the people heard the miraculous sound of a mighty wind and saw the tongues of fire on the apostles, it drew them together. But it was the disciples speaking in various languages and the people hearing in their own languages "the mighty works of God," that led them to ask, "What does this mean?" Others, though, thought the disciples had had too much wine.

So Peter stood up and addressed the crowd. And as he begins the sermon, he quotes from the prophet Joel, "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh." (Acts 2:17). That's what was happening.

But there was more to all this than a mere matter of language. For as the disciples spoke, they spoke a language that most of the world doesn't know or understand. And that language is the Gospel. The people themselves said, "we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." "The wonderful works of God," that's the Gospel! And this Gospel has a language all its own. It sounds strange to those for whom it is new and for those who don't want to hear it. For the language of the Gospel is heavenly language, gift language, life language.

And the reason Gospel language sounds so strange is because we live in a world of the law. We live in a world whose language is full of should's, must's, thou shalt, thou shalt not. Its language is "do this," "don't do that," "or else."

Now this law language is certainly necessary, especially since it is also in God's Word. Because we are born as sinful people into a sinful world, we need the law to curb our actions. But when we are confronted by God, the law doesn't help us one bit. In fact, the law leads us to despair because we can never measure up to God's standard of perfection. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). We can never be good enough. Try as we might, we can never keep God's law perfectly. In fact, He tells us that if we break just one of His commandments, we are guilty of breaking them all (James 2:10). No matter what we do or how well we do it, we can never measure up to God's perfect Law. So the law can't save us. It only accuses and condemns us. The Law shows no mercy. We are left as dead, dry bones.

And that's why Gospel language sounds so strange and so wonderful. For the language of the Gospel is all grace, all mercy, all peace, and all forgiveness. Rather than "no," the Gospel is a resounding "Yes." St. Paul tells us, "For all the promises of God in [Jesus] are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us" (2 Cor. 1:20). Indeed, Gospel language centers in our Savior Jesus Christ. He alone kept the law perfectly for us and fulfilled it totally. He obeyed His Father, even when it meant being nailed to a cross. Though without sin, He willingly suffered the total punishment we deserve because of our sin. Thus, He has earned full forgiveness for all our sins. He rose from the dead to declare His victory over death. He has ascended to the right hand of His Father where He fills all things as He rules over His Church and intercedes for us. He has sent the Holy Spirit to create and sustain saving faith in our hearts, which He does through the Gospel itself. Through this Gospel, the Holy Spirit gives us life and makes and keeps us children of God. No coulda's, woulda's or shoulda's. No "you shall," "you shall not." Certainly,

no “or else.” Only kind, gracious, loving, inviting words. Only words of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Indeed, these are “the wonderful works [and words] of God!” And they give life to dead, dry bones.

Now just as a child learns a language by hearing it over and over, and repeating it over and over, so we also learn this Gospel language by hearing it and repeating it. We learned the beginnings of it when we learned the Bible stories in Sunday school and, if we were fortunate enough, in Lutheran day school. We learned it as our parents faithfully read us those stories and told us of Jesus’ love for us each day. We learned even more as we learned the Catechism at home, at school, and at church. And, as from the beginning, we continue to learn the Gospel language as we gather in the Lord’s House week after week. For in the Divine Service, in the Liturgy itself, Gospel language is spoken and learned. The entire service is God serving us with His gracious and loving words of the forgiveness of our sins. As God’s people gather around His Word and Sacraments, we are immersed in His Gospel language.

Yet, we certainly don’t know this language perfectly. It’s a language we all need to keep learning for the rest of our lives. For as with any language, unless you make frequent and repeated use of it, unless you constantly exercise yourself in it, you will forget it and lose it. That’s why it’s so important to gather here each week to receive our Lord’s gracious, life-giving gifts.

The Holy Spirit has given life to your dead, dry bones as He “called you by the Gospel, enlightened you with His gifts, sanctified and kept you in the true faith.” God grant that we learn that Gospel language well and celebrate the life He gives us through the Holy Spirit and through the Gospel that we would have life with Him now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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