

Lent 5

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Grace mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Our text is the Old Testament lesson from Ezekiel 37.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Today is the Fifth Sunday in Lent. In our collect for today we will pray that God *“look upon his people in **mercy** so that we be governed and preserved in body and soul”*. Our prayer this day is that God show us *mercy*. Why in the world would we pray to God for mercy?

To pray for mercy is a recognition of God’s judgment. The Scriptures would have us know that God is holy and that he is a righteous judge. He is looking down from heaven. He sees into the deep dark places of the soul and he sees my sin. God sees my sin, even those sins that I cannot see. God sees my sin and my unrighteousness. And God’s righteous law condemns me. God’s law condemns me and God’s law condemns you.

Today is the fifth Sunday in Lent. On the Fifth Sunday in Lent we pray for God’s mercy.

I believe it is true that these days we tend to have a secularize view of natural events. That is to say, we don’t see God’s hand involved in those events. We don’t see them as God’s action or intervention. We think that they just sort of happen. So, for example, last summer when there was rain and we couldn’t plant and then drought and what we did plant stopped growing, we didn’t think this was God’s hand, we didn’t think it was some hidden purpose of God’s divine will. We just thought it was a strange weather pattern.

Likewise, with the coronavirus epidemic that has us all locked away in our homes and staying home from work or school. We don’t see this as God’s hand or God’s purpose. We see this as some strange virus mutation that happened over in China and that probably spread around because we are for some reason particularly vulnerable. We see these things in natural terms and we don’t often stop to consider the possibility that maybe this could possibly be God’s hand, that God brought this about. That God intended for this to happen. We see things naturally and overlook the possibility that they might be spiritual.

It is a strange coincidence that this coronavirus epidemic has come about while Christ’s Church is in the midst of the observance of the season of Lent. Lent after all is a penitential season. That is to say, it is a season during which Christians look at themselves in the mirror of God’s law to assess their sinfulness. We meditate on the Commandments and we ask God to show us our sin.

I don't know about you, but this Coronavirus epidemic has revealed sin in me. Likewise, it has revealed sin out there in the world. Let me give you an example:

One of the things that we are all talking about is the scarcity of things like hand sanitizer and toilet paper. We go to the grocery store to find these items and they are nowhere to be seen. What's going on?

Or, when our leaders were busy advising us to stay inside and avoid congregating in large crowds, what did people do? They went to the store and stood in line... congregating in large crowds. What's going on?

What is going on is fear. What is going on is that people, and perhaps we are included, are afraid. We might not be afraid of the virus. But maybe we are afraid that we won't have enough... that other people will take away from us all the things that we need or maybe that we want. This virus has helped to reveal in us our fears and our desires. Our misplaced fears, our disordered desires.

Our behavior, our reaction to this event, helps us to see, helps to uncover for us those things that are our false gods. So ask yourself, how has your behavior changed since this epidemic began? What things occupy your mind? Or your attention? What websites are drawing you and what information are you constantly checking to find? Do you notice that you are irritable or angry? Do you notice that you are anxious? What do these things reveal to you about where you might be placing your trust? What so these things reveals in you as what might be your greatest desire? What sins do you need to confess and what things do you need to give to God?

Again, today is the 5th Sunday in Lent. And in our Collect we pray: *Almighty God, by your great goodness mercifully look up on your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul.*

So what about our Old Testament text?

The prophet Ezekiel, who, by the way, also happens to be the *priest* Ezekiel, is given a vision. In his vision he sees a gruesome sight. A valley full of bones. Our popular culture, anytime it wants to communicate a dire circumstance with a hint of creepiness, it will always portray bones. It will portray a skeleton. Skeletons imply death. This valley was literally a valley of death. A valley filled with dead people, with bones. God had Ezekiel survey the entire site. He went up one side and back down the other. He walked back and forth and even through this valley of death. Ezekiel was horrorstricken. What could have caused such carnage? The priest in Ezekiel (always aware of those things that would causes ceremonial uncleanness) must have

also been horrified to think that God was directing him into such a place. Ezekiel was confronted with death.

Likewise are we. We are every day confronted with the reality of death. Some would have us believe that death is natural, that it is simply that which happens when people grow old... they "expire". Scripture tells us that death is judgment. Death is God's judgment.

So, Ezekiel was confronted with death. We are confronted with death. We recognize God's judgment. We pray to God for mercy. And, in our Old Testament text, we see God's mercy.

God directed Ezekiel to speak to the bones. "Son of man, can these bones live?" In other words, is there any hope? We ask ourselves that same question every day. Is there any hope? Is there any hope for me? Is there any hope for the world? Is there any hope for my family? My kids? My friends? Well, ask yourself this: is there any hope for a valley of dry bones? I would say "no, But what did God say?

God said, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD.'"

God told Ezekiel to speak to the bones. To talk to them. To proclaim to them that God would send breath into them. And with that breath would come skin and tendons and flesh. And then once these bones were covered with flesh, God would cause them to be filled with life. God would breathe out his spirit and his spirit would go into these bones so that those who were dead would be made alive. God would bring life into this valley of death.

I wonder what Ezekiel thought when God told him to do this? I wonder if he was skeptical? If he doubted? I will tell you that these days, modern preachers are indeed skeptical. Today's preachers often doubt if their preaching will do any good. If anyone is listening. If anyone will hear. Modern preachers feel like their preaching falls on deaf ears. I wonder what Ezekiel must have thought.

Regardless of what he thought, he obeyed. Likewise do our modern preachers obey. They keep preaching. Ezekiel preached and God, who is faithful, sent out his "breath". Now, not to bore you with too many details, but breath and wind and spirit are all the same word in Hebrew. *Ruach* God breathed out his Spirit. Which makes sense, right. When you are getting ready to speak, you breath in. And then while you are speaking you are breathing out. The Lord God breathed out through the mouth of Ezekiel his own word. Ezekiel inhaled the Word of the Lord and exhaled the Spirit. And the Spirit went out and filled up those dry bones. To

say nothing of deaf ears, the Word of God filled empty skulls that didn't even have ears. The Word of God blew thought the vacant rib cages that didn't even have hearts. The Word of God, the Spirit of God, the breath of God blew through that valley of dry bones and he made ears where there were no ears so that they could hear. He made hearts where there were no hearts so that they could believe. He made mouths where there were not mouths so that they could confess. And Then the Spirit of God breathed into them and they became alive. What an amazing miracle.

And God has done the same miracle here among us. At home, with you, as you are sitting there in your living room, as you are watching on your computer or some other device. God's Word is breathed out and blowing into you. Calling your ears that refuse to listen and your heart that refuses to believe. God is calling you to repent of your sin, to turn to him in faith, to leave behind your foolishness and believe.

Today is the Fifth Sunday in Lent. Today we acknowledge God's judgment and we pray for God's mercy.

Almighty God, by your great goodness mercifully look up on your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul, through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord who lives and reigns with you, one God now and forever.

Amen.

You have received mercy. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.