

Notes for Next Sunday

Fifth Sunday in Lent

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Ezekiel 37:1-14). After Ezekiel deflated the pride and self-conceit of his hearers (ch 36), he had to overcome their reluctance to accept the Gospel of restoration. Because the heart of the exiles was “deceitful ... and desperately sick” (Jer 17:9), they did not greet the glorious promise of redemption with jubilation but with the doleful lament of despair: “Our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off” (Ezk 37:11). However, the Good Shepherd does not hesitate to seek out also the sheep that have strayed into the desolate country of sullen doubt and bleak hopelessness. He granted Ezekiel a vision that was to convince his hearers that their despair grew out of their refusal to believe in a Creator who “calls into existence the things that do not exist”

Epistle (Romans 8:1-11). Chapter 8 begins with “no condemnation...in Christ.” What follows is an unparalleled presentation of the Spirit’s work (referred to 19 times in vv 1-27) to sanctify and keep us in the faith. Luther says: “In chapter 8 (Paul) comforts these fighters, telling them that this flesh does not condemn them. He shows further what the nature of flesh and spirit is, and how the Spirit comes from Christ. Christ has given us His Holy Spirit; He makes us spiritual and subdues the flesh, and assures us that we are still God’s children, however hard sin may be raging within us, so long as we follow the Spirit and resist sin to slay it. (TLSB)

Gospel (John 11:17-27, 38-52). The first section (17-27) of this text deals with the fact that by the time Jesus arrives Lazarus has died and his sisters are grieving. When talking in terms Lazarus being raised, Martha thinks eternity and Jesus is talking about Him raising Lazarus shortly. The next section is made up of verses 38-44. This describes Jesus’ raising Lazarus from the dead and uttering a prayer to the Father about this teaching moment. The third section includes verse 45-53. Here we see the divide that is taking place where many people were brought to faith and how some were turned off and went to the Pharisees. This leads to a meeting of the Sanhedrin and shortly to Christ’s suffering and death.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. ³He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.” ⁴Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! ⁵This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath^a enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’” ⁷So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” ¹⁰So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. ¹¹Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ ¹²Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³Then you, my people, will know

that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.”

37:1 hand of the LORD. Means an open hand which is very powerful and gives direction.

37:1 Spirit of the LORD. Hebrew *ruach*, also denotes “breath” (vv 5, 6, 8, 9, 10) and “winds” (v 9). (TLSB)

37:1 bones. Verse 11 interprets them as symbolizing Israel’s apparently hopeless condition in exile. (CSB)

37:2 very dry. Long dead, far beyond the reach of resuscitation. (CSB)

37:4-6 Through His Word, God promises miraculous change, despite the description in v 2. The bones, arranged according to their former function and position, are covered with sinews and flesh. (TLSB)

37:10 breath came into them. Humanly speaking, Israel’s hopes for survival appeared dead and buried in the exile. Prospects of national revival were as unlikely as expecting a vast array of skeletons, dried and dismembered, to come to life again. Yet at God’s command, spoken by His prophet, death must surrender its victims. (TLSB)

37:14 I will settle you in your own land. † These words make it clear that the Lord is not speaking here of a general resurrection from the dead but of the national restoration of Israel, apparently dead and buried in the exile. (CSB)

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. ⁵Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; ⁷the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. ⁸Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. ⁹You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. ¹¹And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

8:1 condemnation. The law brings condemnation because it points out, stimulates and condemns sin. But the Christian is no longer “under law” (6:14). (CSB)

8:2 law of sin and death. The controlling power of sin, which ultimately produces death. (CSB)

8:3 in the likeness of sinful man. Christ in his incarnation became truly a man, but, unlike all other men, was sinless. (CSB)

8:9 *dwells in you*. Christians as a body (the Church) are the place of God's abiding presence. The Third Person of the Trinity, not merely some "force," resides in them. (TLSB)

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. ²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

11:17 four days. Perhaps significant because of the rabbinic belief that the soul hovers over the body for three days and then departs when decomposition sets in. John's point is that only a genuine miracle could account for the raising of Lazarus. (TLSB)

11:25 I am. In the Greek the words are solemnly emphatic and echo Ex 3:14. (CSB)

11:41 looked up. Jesus prays, making clear that this act is a work given him by the Father who sent him. Effected through the Word of Christ, this miracle, as well as his own resurrection, most vividly portrays the glory of his Godhead. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

11:44 strips of linen. Burial customs included wrapping a corpse with strips of cloth, effectively binding it. (TLSB)

11:45 many of the Jews ... put their faith in him. Perhaps some who had been opposed to Jesus now came to believe. (CSB)

11:49 You know nothing at all! A remark typical of Sadducean rudeness (Caiaphas, as high priest, was a Sadducee). Josephus says that Sadducees "in their intercourse with their peers are as rude as to aliens." (CSB)

11:51 prophesied. Caiaphas is compelled by God to utter more than he intends or knows. Like Balaam of old, he must speak what God puts in his mouth (Num 23:12). Despite abuses of the priestly office, the Lord abided with the ministry He established. (Mt. 23:2) (TLSB)