

The Essentials: The Church

Session 4: CORPSE

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Opening Collect

Together: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Read: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Opening Thought

According to Scripture the Israelites' exile under the Assyrians (721 BC) and Babylonians (587 BC) was the result of unfaithfulness, idolatry, and corruption. Israel had functionally become *not* Israel. And so, our passage today not only prompts the question, can the church endure, but also, can it die? We must take this, "corpse," image seriously because 1) it is many people's experience of the church, and 2) the church has, in fact, failed repeatedly throughout history to remain faithful. The power of this figure in Ezekiel is that it reveals to us both the fragility of the church *and* the greatness of God's love for his people. The church doesn't step outside of the struggles, failures, and dilemmas of the world. She undergoes it all alongside the world, and yet has the hope and power of God. We can admit that we're wrong, have messed things up, are irrelevant, *precisely because* we know that God is one who resurrects the dead.

Discussion:

1. Have you had experiences of the church that are discouraging, dispirited, hurtful, or even boring? Be honest! When does the church stop becoming the church?
2. We tend to think of the church as set apart from the challenges and struggles as the rest of the world—abuse, corruption, mental illness, etc.—and yet Christians struggle under the ongoing presence of all those afflictions. If the church doesn't always look different, then what does she offer the world?
3. No church body has ever lived up to the standards of the law completely. What does this image of resurrection say to the church in repentance and renewal?
4. When have you seen resurrection in the church?

Check in and Closing Prayer

Ezekiel 37:1-14

[1] The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. [2] And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. [3] And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." [4] Then he said to me, "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. [6] 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."

[7] So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. [8] And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. [9] Then he said to me, "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." [10] So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

[11] 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.' [12] 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. [13] And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. [14] 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."