

Women's Club

Job 19. 1-27

Ezekiel 37.1-14

Ephesians 2.1-10

In Job's response to his friends "How long will you torment me and crush me with words", we hear a voice that is all too familiar. We hear our own voice calling out to our torments. We hear the power that words can have in order to tear us down. Like Job we are in need of a word to turn our suffering into comfort. As Job continues he begins to come to terms with his own imperfections. The words of Job give voice to our own inner thoughts that torment us, thoughts we rarely say aloud, and never in worship. They remind us that we have fallen short, that we have sinned, that we are trapped by our own mistakes. Job is a man who is broken down, he truly has nothing left but what is left of his life and whatever plea he can make before he finally dies, and he knows it, he knows his time is short.

At this point Job is feeling the full weight of his hardships and the judgment laid upon him for his sins, the judgment that he hears in the words spoken to him by his friends. These are the kinds of sins which alienate us from our families, the kinds of sins which turn our closest relationships to dust before our very eyes. The sins which cut us off from our Creator. These are the sins that Job has before him, Job the man of honor, who is seeing the death of all that he has, before he at last breathes his last. Without these loving relationships Job is right to say "I am nothing but skin and bones". Without relationships to give life meaning, Job is nothing more than flesh and bone. This is how we all come to the cross as we make our way through Lent. We come broken and sinful, in need of a word of comfort. We come like Job, people in desperate

need of some words to give meaning to what we're going through. We want something that can comfort us, a word from a spouse, or a friend, but that's not something they can give. For many of us that is what brought us to the Church, hoping for some words. Human words just won't do, and neither will words so separated from human suffering. We need some other word.

This is the Word of the Lord.

What is needed is not just a word but the Word which descends right down into our humanity. Not merely words on paper or words spoken from the pulpit but the Word which had the power to create, the Word which took on the suffering and death which we deserve, and the Word through which we are created anew. We come to God asking do you have such a word?

Where we leave Job, he is still flesh, he is still able to at the very least give voice to his torment. When we come to the Ezekiel text, there isn't even flesh, there is no voice. The Lord shows Ezekiel the valley of the dry bones, a place of death. After Ezekiel walks through this valley and sees all of the bones the Lord asks him, "Son of man, can these bones live"? This is the question on which this passage and Job both hinge. This is the question that we continue to bring before God.

Can Job, the man who has lost it all, and is on the verge of death, can these bones which are completely devoid of life live? Can we people broken down by life, and weighed down by sin live? Can that which is empty, broken, and lifeless be made to live again? Can this church, which has gone through turmoil and loss live? Can the Church, which we are told is becoming irrelevant to the younger generation live? Can humanity, which always seems to be falling deeper into depravity live? The answer that Ezekiel gives is "Sovereign Lord, you alone know". Ezekiel who knows the God of Creation who brought life out of nothingness, defers the answer

to God. The Lord answers with a command to Ezekiel saying “Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord’!” The Lord commands Ezekiel to prophesy to bones who cannot hear him, Ezekiel is commanded to take the message he has been given to somewhere that seems hopeless.

How foolish this must have looked, this prophet of God standing among the dead, telling them not to give up hope. How foolish it must have looked for the prophet of God to be standing among the dead and telling them to live. If these bones could speak, how similar their words would be to poor Job, but they cannot, they have nothing left to say, nothing left to hope, they are truly and utterly dead. God knows this but He commands Ezekiel to tell them to hear the word of the Lord. No matter how loud the voice which torments us screams reminding us of our sins, reminding us that our death is near, telling us that we are nothing or worthless, telling us that death is the final word, next to the Word of the Lord, all else falls silent.

The Word of the Lord silences all other voices, with one singular message. The Lord finishes His command by saying that once the bones are given life anew, they will know that He is the Lord. The bones will know that there is only one who can truly give life where none exists, give hope where all other hopes have dried up. Ezekiel recounts how he dutifully did as he was commanded, and then he heard the rattling of the bones, they came together, were given flesh. Then the Lord commanded the prophet to prophesy to the breath, and once life had returned to what was just a pile of bones without life, without identity, stood up, individuals made anew, individuals made anew into community. The bones which were indistinguishable from one another become individuals, together before the Word of God, before their Creator and Redeemer.

These two passages bring together our sinfulness, our utter hopelessness, our death, which gives flesh to what Paul says, “You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived”. In Job we see a man who while still in the flesh, still alive, but who is dead because of sin. Even though we remain alive, we are as dead as the bones of Ezekiel’s valley. But we know this is not the final word, even though during this time of Lent, the Church calendar calls us to repentance, reminds of us our sins, just how truly deserving we each are of God’s judgment, and how worthy we are of death, that is not where God leaves us to rot, to decay into bones. Paul reminds us that God “out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ”.

Though we live, we live for our own death, dead because of our sins, dead because that is what we deserve. This idea can be a hard one to swallow. But our sins are the only thing that gives Paul’s words concrete meaning, the only thing which gives what God did for us through the work of Christ the proper title of love. This great love is great because of our great sins, it is great because of what it costs God to redeem us, the life of Christ, and it is grace because God gives it freely. This is the only reason that we are able to find life and joy in what Christ has done for me, and for you. Paul, declares to the reader “you have been saved”, which tells all who come to the text “you have been saved”, as a statement of fact, as true as God’s Word given to the dry bones. We are not able to by our own merits able to bring about our own salvation, we are not able to earn our own salvation, not even close, it is only through the Word of God made flesh in Jesus Christ that we are able to receive the grace which saves. It is this Word which made Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones into living people, which makes broken and sinful people into people justified and saved before God. This is God’s singular message, when we come to God and ask, do you have the word we need? The Gospel’s answer is yes

This is the answer that Job clings to when he says “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me”! Job knows that his Redeemer, the one who turns his death into life, lives, and even after his skin has been destroyed, and he is as lifeless as the valley of dry bones, he will see God. Job knows he will see God on his side, no longer as an enemy or accuser but in the loving relationship that Job desperately needs to no longer be only flesh and bone. The relationships God always intended for His Creation, a personal loving, grace-filled relationship that He desires for each of us, is the relationship that Job sees in his future. We can see clearly how depressed Job is, but even in the face of death he insists that he will behold God, and his heart faints at the joy!

Ezekiel echoes that this relationship will be restored “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely. Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live”.

The Lord gives meaning to Ezekiel’s strange vision by explaining that the dry bones are the hopeless people of Israel, living in Babylon, away from their homeland. Their cries of despair, are about to be answered by the Word of God, which has the power to bring life to the dead, and can bring hope to the hopeless. The Lord promises to bring up these people who have become dead, up out of their graves, and bring them back to the land He had given them. The graves they have dug for themselves and buried themselves in to live in exile, to cope with being

away from their people, away from their land, away from their God, are the graves that God will call them out of. The Lord calls to His people, and promises to put his spirit within them and they shall live.

This life is precisely the life that Paul concludes with saying, “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life”. These good works are good works which can only be a response to God’s grace. These good works are not our own, but are only possible as people who have experienced God’s grace, people who are justified. We have no choice but to respond to this grace, we have no choice but to respond to God’s great love, we have no choice but to respond to God’s Word. These good works are not the works of a fallen humanity, wallowing in sin and self-doubt, or the dead, but the works of people who God has forgiven, and live for Him. We are sent out as the people who have been given new life, we are not sent out to continually be hindered by our sins. Our sins make us dead, unable to move past Paul’s condemnation, but God’s Word will call us to new life whether we want it or not. God calls to our bones, and tells us to live, we are called to discipleship. That is why we are all here, to encounter God’s word, to fulfill that yearning for it, and see what life it creates in us. When God asks can these bones live, truly live as we are meant to, the answer is yes, by God’s Word alone.