

## Sermon for Morning Prayer The Fourth Sunday after Easter

### Lessons: <sup>i</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the thirty-seventh Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel. <sup>ii</sup>

“The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

“Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off from our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the third Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>iii</sup>

“Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering.

“And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

**Text:**

From the First Lesson: “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....”<sup>iv</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

**Introduction:**

Today’s First Lesson is the last of the four great visions<sup>v</sup> recorded by Ezekiel. In it, God has led the prophet to a valley which had been the site of one of Israel’s desperate battles against the Chaldeans for its national existence. This was probably<sup>vi</sup> either the same place where Ezekiel had received his call from God to serve as a prophet<sup>vii</sup> or the plain of Jericho.<sup>viii</sup>

In either case, as was also true of the great storm<sup>ix</sup> that formed the backdrop to Ezekiel’s call to prophecy, this was an actual site, on which the bones of the unburied casualties still lay on the field.<sup>x</sup> This is a useful reminder that the God who made Himself known to Ezekiel, and through Ezekiel’s writings to us, is the God Who manifests Himself throughout human history.

**Theme and Development:**

As was true of Ezekiel’s great storm, these visible relics of the battle served as the props or exhibits which God used more effectively to give to the prophet His message of national restoration. God delivered this message in the form of a metaphor, a vision of the decayed bodies of soldiers slain in battle. From the historical perspective, these bodies represent the destruction in battle of the Jewish bodies politic; from the prophetic perspective, they represent the restoration first to wholeness and then to life of those same bodies politic.<sup>xi</sup>

As one commentator has noted, once God’s life force has revived – literally, re-enlivened – these defunct Jewish kingdoms, they can only continue to exist as a regenerated people if they continue to be infused by the Holy Spirit.<sup>xii</sup>

That is, these men brought back to life are symbols of the political<sup>xiii</sup> restoration and reunion of the independent Jewish kingdoms,<sup>xiv</sup> forming a major

part of the messianic prophecies that later led the populace of Jerusalem to assume that Our Lord was to serve as a military and political leader rather than a spiritual one.

From this perspective, therefore, we may note the irony that these dry bones restored to fullness of life are also *types* or Biblical precursors of the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body. When God addresses to Ezekiel the words “Son of man, can these bones live?□,<sup>xv</sup> the title “son of man” is the same one that the Gospels will ascribe to Our Lord<sup>xvi</sup> and the question “can these bones live”, although asked in the context of a national restoration, is a precursor of Our Lord’s victory over death, a victory which is extended to us in His promise of our own individual resurrections.<sup>xvii</sup>

The metaphor recorded by Ezekiel also employs a peculiarity of Hebrew vocabulary. Hebrew, like Greek, has only one word, *rûa*□ [**roo-ACH**]<sup>xviii</sup> that means simultaneously “wind”, “breath”, and “spirit”.<sup>xix</sup> Thus when God instructs Ezekiel to address the dry bones with these words, He is promising them they will be reinvigorated, re-enlivened, and re-inspired, and so returned to life as before: “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....”<sup>xx</sup>

Here the immediate overall image is that, in order for Israel to be restored politically and militarily, God must breathe life into it,<sup>xxi</sup> just as He had breathed life into the first man, Adam.<sup>xxii</sup> “And as I looked, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then said he to me, ‘Prophesy to the breath,<sup>xxiii</sup> prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath,<sup>xxiv</sup> Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds,<sup>xxv</sup> O breath, and breathe<sup>xxvi</sup> upon these slain, that they may live.’ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceedingly great host.”<sup>xxvii</sup>

Of course, God did fulfill the promise He made through Ezekiel. In the short term, or from the micro perspective, He granted the Jewish people a brief return of their united and independent political existence, although that lasted only a couple of centuries at most, from the Maccabees to the coming of the Romans.

In the long term, however, that is, from the macro perspective, God has restored the old Israel, the nation of the Mosaic covenant, in the form of the new Israel, the supranational people of the new and everlasting covenant of the incarnate Christ. This restored kingdom has already lasted for nearly two thousand years and may well last for many more yet.

### **Conclusion:**

Therefore, what is now important to us, as Christians, who have seen the fulfillment of the Old Testament *type* or precursor of Ezekiel's prophecy, is the *antitype* or New Testament counterpart. To put it another way, the *type* is the prophecy or foretelling and the *antitype* is the thing prophesied or foretold. In this case, the *type* was the restoration of the whole nation and the *antitype* is the resurrection of each individual Christian in a perfected body.

What this means to each of us is that we have before us the evidence that God will fulfill that promise. In the face of this assurance, the task of each individual is to make his or her election sure, "For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end...."<sup>xxviii</sup>

At that point, we may trust that His breath will come into us, and we shall live, and stand up upon our feet, an exceeding great host.<sup>xxix</sup>

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister  
May 2, 2010.

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<sup>i</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

<sup>ii</sup> *Ezekiel 37: 1-14 (KJV).*

<sup>iii</sup> *Acts 3: 1-21 (KJV).*

<sup>iv</sup> *Ezekiel 37: 5b-6a (RSV).*

<sup>v</sup> *William Hugh Brownlee, The Book of Ezekiel, in CHARLES M. LAYMON, ED., THE INTERPRETER'S ONE-VOLUME COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE 412 (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1971).*

<sup>vi</sup> *Brownlee, op. cit. 430.*

<sup>vii</sup> *Ezekiel 3: 22-27. Cf. J. Muilenburg, Ezekiel, in MATTHEW BLACK AND H. H. ROWLEY, EDs., PEAKE'S COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE 586 (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1962, 1982); Robert R.*

Wilson, Ezekiel, in JAMES L. MAYS, ED., *HARPER'S BIBLE COMMENTARY* 691 (Harper San Francisco 1988).

<sup>viii</sup> Brownlee, *op cit.* 430; cf. Deuteronomy 34: 3 and II Kings 25: 5.

<sup>ix</sup> Brownlee, *op cit.* 415.

<sup>x</sup> E.g., Arnold J. Tkacik, Ezekiel, in I RAYMOND E. BROWN, JOSEPH A. FITZMYER, AND ROLAND E. MURPHY, EDS., *THE JEROME BIBLICAL COMMENTARY* 361 (Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968). While Tkacik assumes this vision took place in Babylon, and therefore that the battlefield was likewise there, others see it as being located in Palestine, e.g., Brownlee, *op cit.* 412, and thus probably on one of the traditional invasion routes into that country.

<sup>xi</sup> CHARLES CALDWELL RYRIE, *RYRIE STUDY BIBLE EXPANDED EDITION KING JAMES VERSION* 1241 fn. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.)

<sup>xii</sup> RYRIE, *op. cit.*

<sup>xiii</sup> RYRIE, *op. cit.*

<sup>xiv</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, Ezekiel, in D. GUTHRIE AND J. A. MOTYER, EDS., *THE NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY REVISED* 3rd ed. 681 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1970).

<sup>xv</sup> Ezekiel 37: 3a (KJV).

<sup>xvi</sup> E.g., St. Matthew 16: 27-28 and 20: 28; St. Mark 2: 28 and 9: 9; St. Luke 5: 24 and 17: 22; St. John 5: 27 and 12: 34.

<sup>xvii</sup> E.g., St. Matthew 22: 31-32 and 24: 31; St. Mark 12: 25-27; St. Luke 14: 14 and 20: 36; St. John 5: 21.

<sup>xviii</sup> Pronounced with a rasping or hawking sound that rhymes with the Scots "loch" as in "Loch Ness" and the German "Ach" as in "Ach, du lieber Augustin".

<sup>xix</sup> Cf. *The Book of Ezekiel*, HERBERT G. MAY AND BRUCE M. METZGER, EDS., *THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE WITH THE APOCRYPHA Revised Standard Version* 1048 fn. 9 (Oxford University Press 1977).

<sup>xx</sup> Ezekiel 37: 5b-6a (RSV).

<sup>xxi</sup> RYRIE, *op. cit.*

<sup>xxii</sup> Genesis 2: 7.

<sup>xxiii</sup> *The Authorized (King James) Version* translates this as "wind".

<sup>xxiv</sup> *The Authorized (King James) Version* translates this as "wind".

<sup>xxv</sup> These "four winds" are probably an expression meaning "to the four corners of the earth", that is, "everywhere", cf. Beasley-Murray, *op cit.*; RYRIE, *op. cit.* Thus as symbols of "the whole world" they would also be a symbol for the omnipresence of God, MAY AND METZGER, *op cit.*

<sup>xxvi</sup> See footnote 3 *supra*.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Ezekiel 37: 8-10 (RSV).

<sup>xxviii</sup> Hebrews 3: 14 (RSV).

<sup>xxix</sup> Cf. Ezekiel 37: 10.