

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Can these bones live again? This passage is one of the greatest word paintings in the Bible. Old, dry bones filling a field come to life because God causes the breath of life to come back into them. Centuries after Ezekiel's vision, a man came to Jesus. When Jesus asked him what He could do for him, the man replied that he wanted to see again. Both stories tell of something being restored that had been lost or forgotten.



The man to whom Jesus spoke was a Jew. The bones of the field in Ezekiel's vision represented God's people. They had lost their way and dried up inside. Like old bones they had become brittle and without hope. But they were still God's people; His love for them continued.

Many Christians today have also forgotten who they really are and to what purpose they have been called. Many want to find their purpose again, but feel like it is too late or that they just don't know how to regain what they once had. The purpose that they have lost or forgotten is the command from Jesus to spread the good news of a salvation that is free to all people. Christians sometimes forget that because they are too comfortable in the church, too busy with church duties, too tired from life's other stresses, too angry at a world filled with sin and hate, or too forgetful of the tragedy of unbelief. Sometimes they feel like the bones in the field without the energy to roll over or to get up and get back into spreading the Gospel of Christ.

Ezekiel said of God's work in the field of bones, "...the breath came into them [the bones] and they came to life, and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army." God said to the bones of His people, "...I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life...."

We cannot create a living church. On our own we will create a church that is made up of tired people who have lost the will to pursue unbelievers with the good news of Jesus. Without the power of the Holy Spirit guiding and empowering us, we will forget our purpose of reaching out to those around us with Jesus. We might even forget that we can only really live out our faith by the power of God in every day of our lives.

*Studying God's Word is easier with friends. Join a Bible study group!
A message from your District Education Committee*

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Ezekiel 37:1-14

1. With what title is the prophet addressed (vs. 3, 9, 11)? Who was addressed with a similar title? (Matt. 8:20; Matt. 12:8)? What's the difference?



2. Describe the vision of Ezekiel? What might have been his feelings and fears?
3. The experience is explained in vs. 11ff. What was to be the application of Ezekiel's vision?
4. Find the references to the Spirit in this lesson. This text is also used as a Pentecost Sunday text. Why is it appropriate for that celebration?
5. Read the Epistle (Romans 8:1-19) and Gospel (John 11:47-53) for the day. How does Ezekiel's message relate to these lessons?
6. What traditional "spiritual" song is based on this incident?

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34

The covenants had all been broken by God's people. They had replaced grace with law; they had disregarded God's love and chosen to live by their own power. How could God show them their error and bring them back into a relationship with Him? God knew that this time of disobedience would come. The pictures of relationship presented in the covenants were given by Him to prepare them to understand Jesus, who would fulfill all of the covenants before Him. They had not been able to fulfill their part of the covenant relationship. Only Jesus could do that.

Jesus entered our world, ministered, died, and was resurrected. He showed us the fullness of God. He redeemed us by His death. In Him the curtain in the temple was split and access to God was guaranteed to us all. The perfect covenant had been established by His blood.

So how is our covenant relationship with God different as we live out our own lives? The people of the Old Testament believed that they had to fulfill the requirements of God on their own. To fail in this meant that they would lose God. We have the joy of knowing that Jesus has fulfilled all of the requirements already. That doesn't mean that we are free to do as we please while disregarding God's will. We were purchased by God at the cost of His Son's blood. We are now His people who are obligated to live in Him. We do this not out of fear that we will lose our salvation, but out of our love for a Master who would give His life for us. We are able to live out our lives knowing our eternity is secured and knowing the peace of Christ which surpasses human understanding.

That peace and love overflows into all of our relationships. Relationships of marriage, friendship, work, play, worship, and family. Because Jesus has given us a covenant of love we are able to share that love with everyone in our lives. It's not in our power to do this but it is in His.



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Fifth Sunday in Lent

Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34

1. What "old" covenants had God made with His people (Genesis 9:8-17; Genesis 15:9-21; Exodus 19; 2 Samuel 7:5-16)? Note: The Concordia Self-Study Bible includes a detailed listing on page 18.
2. What had happened to the previous covenants (vs. 32)?
3. According to vs. 34, what would be the scope of this new covenant?
4. These words are repeated (and fulfilled) in Hebrews 8:8-12 and Hebrews 10:16-17. When and how did God fulfill this promise?
5. What does this new covenant and the promise of vs. 34 mean to you?
6. Our baptism and confirmation are covenant experiences. What promises do we make to God because of His connection to us?



Fifth Sunday In Lent

Isaiah 43:16-21

Isaiah 42 described the rebellion of God's people who refused to be faithful. Chapter 43 began, "But now..." In chapter 43 God promises His salvation to this people who seem to be capable only of rebellion. In verse 11 He said, "Apart from Me there is no savior."

In today's lesson God speaks to past events that His people held most dear, the miracles surrounding the exodus from Egypt. He recalls these miracles to remind them of His ability to bring salvation. In their future God would make a road through the wilderness, streams in the desert, and provide drink for His people. Yet, after this glorious promise, the vision of Messiah's work, the Lord continues in verse 22 that His people still will not call on His name.

What is there about us (for we are as rebellious as God's people in the Old Testament) that cannot constantly honor our God who has blessed us, loved us unconditionally, given His Son to die for our rebellion, and through Him promised us eternity in His kingdom? We are far more receptive to human love (parents, spouse) and respectful of that love than we are to the perfect, constant love of God. The words may sound harsh, but do our priorities not send a message of rebellion? Are we not as reticent to demonstrate the love of our God to the world as were the Israelites? Our thoughts and actions are rarely righteous in the eyes of God. We continue as sinners even though we know of His love.

Perhaps this can be part of our Lenten meditation and prayer. Christ died for us though we were sinners and remain sinners. St. Paul once said, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all." (1 Timothy 1:15) Note that this man called by Christ did not say "I was" a sinner, but that "I am" a sinner. Yet, along with Paul we have the marvelous gift of God's forgiveness through Christ. We have it even in the midst of our failure. We are so loved that we are never left alone. The Holy Spirit dwells within us, calling us and enabling us to praise and worship our Savior God.

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(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

Fifth Sunday In Lent

Isaiah 43:16-21

1. What Biblical incident is referred to in vs. 16-17 (Exodus 14)?

2. How do we see God's power in the descriptive words that conclude vs. 17? Pharaoh's army seemed so powerful but to God it is only a _____.

3. What "new thing" is God working in vs. 19? (Jeremiah 31:31; Hebrews 12:24; Ephesians 4:23-24:)

4. What changes in the desert are described (vs. 19-20)? How is this a spiritual transformation? Where do we find our "water"?

5. What is God's purpose for His people according to vs. 21?

6. What are some of the desert times in our lives? Does God leave us alone? How does He rescue us and provide for us?



Fifth Sunday in Lent

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Have you ever felt downtrodden, hopelessly tired, discouraged, frustrated, and ready to give up? Have you ever despaired over the loss of a job, a family farm, or even a loved one? Have you ever felt really, really, alone? Lump all of these feelings together and you will have an inkling of the mood of an entire nation of individuals in Ezekiel's time.

Tragedy had overcome them even though their lives had once seemed untouchable. Their nation had been wealthy and respected. It was "chosen" by the most powerful of the gods—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He had delivered them for centuries but now He seemed gone; the leaders of His nation dragged into exile.

At first the exiled leaders and their followers had known hope. Not all the citizens of Jerusalem had been forced from their homes, and perhaps God would cause the enemy to suddenly turn back from the city, or die in their tents, as He had done to the Assyrian armies. But, no miracle happened and word had eventually come that Jerusalem and the temple had been sacked and burned. God was gone from His city and from His people!

Ezekiel says that in a vision God carried him to a valley of hopelessly dead bones and, beyond all reasonable expectation, brought the bones to life. The bones did not raise themselves up. It was God who did it all. It was He who explained the vision to the prophet: like the bones, the exiles would live again. God's message to His despairing people was clear—"Even now, I am still your God!"

Sometimes even Christians find themselves feeling as though God has moved on, leaving them alone and sad, but Lent can remind us that though there is sometimes despair in life, God never leaves us; He never gives up on us. Though it is a time of remembering our sin and Jesus' suffering, as we near the end of Lent, we begin to see a light coming from an empty tomb. It is God's assurance to us, and it is clear. In spite of the suffering; in spite of the sin; in spite even of the end of life, "I am still your God who has conquered death for you!"

Learn more about God's mercy and love in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee.

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Ezekiel 37:1-14

1. What Power directs Ezekiel's experience? (vs. 1) What effect would that Power also have on the people of Israel?
2. What title is given to Ezekiel? (vs. 3, vs. 11). Using the Concordia Self-study Bible or another reference explore this title (Note Ezekiel 2:1). How many times is the title used in this book of prophecy? What is the difference between Ezekiel as "Son of man" and Jesus as "Son of Man"?
3. What happened to the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision? (vs. 7-11) How do you imagine Ezekiel reacting to what he saw?
4. What was God's message through Ezekiel's vision (vs. 11-14)?
5. Note the power of the prophet's word (vs. 4). What was the true source of that power? Is the "word of the Lord" still a powerful word? How do you see the power of that word in your life?
6. Have you ever felt as lifeless as the bones in Ezekiel's vision? Where does our new life come from?

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Hebrews 5:7-9

We often think of Jesus as the God-Man who offered Himself on the cross for our sin. We think of Him as God's Son, and we think of Him as God. We think of Him as part of the Trinity. We think of Him as our Resurrected Lord. We envision Him as our supernatural High Priest, bringing Himself to God as the final sacrifice for all sin for all time.

Today Paul reminds us that Jesus was also like all human high priests in a very important way. In verse 2, just before today's passage, Paul says that a high priest "...can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness..."

Like the high priests who served God among the Jewish people, Jesus was a man. Unlike them, He was the perfect and truly real Man. He did not give into weakness and temptation. Unlike the high priests and us, He never sinned.

Our joy in knowing that Jesus was Man is that, like the Jewish high priests of His time, Jesus did not have to commit a particular sin in order to understand the one who did. Jesus did not have to sin in order to understand the pain and suffering and temptations that men and women meet every day. He was tempted; He knew sadness; He knew grief and great physical pain.

The completeness of Jesus' life and ministry was such that when we think of Him as our High Priest who approaches His Father in our behalf, we do not think of One who has visited us but never understood us. We do not think of One who saw us from a distance, but to whom we cannot confide because He could never understand. Rather we know that our High Priest has walked in the dust of our roads, eaten our food, loved as we love, and grown tired as we grow tired. He grieved the loss of a friend and suffered injustice. He was tempted just as we are tempted. We can go to him. We can trust Him to go to His Father in our behalf. He will not say, "I just can't figure these creatures out," because He has been one of us. He is our Priest and perfect Sacrifice.

Learn more about God's power in our lives in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Hebrews 5:7-9

1. Who was Malchizedek? See Genesis 14:18-20. In what context is he referred to in this text?
2. Jesus is the source of _____ (vs. 9). Is He the only source?
3. The Explanation to Luther's Small Catechism refers to the three fold office of Jesus (question 125). What office is noted in this text? What is His role in this office?

For Family Reflection

4. Who are some of the people that we obey? Who did Jesus obey? What does it mean to be obedient to Jesus?
5. In what ways do we see our pastors in a "priestly" role? Who is the model for the priesthood?
6. Jesus "offered up prayers and petitions" (vs. 7). Use this devotional time as a time of prayer. Make a list of individuals and needs for whom to pray. Does your family have a time set aside for daily prayers? If you don't, now might be a good time to schedule a regular time for prayer.

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Philippians 3:4-14

As this passage begins, Paul has just stated that we, as Christians, “*put no confidence in the flesh.*” (vs.3) Today, some think that we as Christians are too weak to meet our goals or that we are too ignorant to understand the reality of life. Paul, knowing that this was a claim of the religious leaders in his own time, continues “*although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh.*” He assures his critics that he himself is neither stupid nor ignorant. His faith in Christ is not that of one who has nothing else on which to depend.

Paul said to his religious critics what we can say to our world, that we know what it knows, and we understand it to be in error. The leaders of Paul’s time thought that they had all the answers. They thought that they understood religion and spirituality. They thought that they knew the way to God, self-fulfillment, and understanding. Paul confidently sought out these leaders in order to tell them what was wrong with their reasoning. Their logic was flawed! He knew that the salvation given by God in His mercy and love is the only salvation that makes any sense at all.

Paul had tried their ways. He had tried out the theories about being a person in control of his own destiny. That was the basis of Jewish thought—to control one’s relationship with God by controlling one’s actions. It didn’t work.

Like Paul, we know how the world thinks God works, or doesn’t work; how the world defines happiness; how the world defines love; how the world looks at itself and its future, and we know that the world’s assumed truths are the work of flawed logic. We know that the world isn’t what it claims to be.

Like Paul, we can stand up to the world and tell it that we do know its ways and we are able to run our lives like it wants, but we choose not to because it just doesn’t work. Only God has kept His promises; only He has provided a fool proof way into His presence. Only He makes any real sense at all. Like Paul we can confidently say, “*I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*” (vs.8)

Learn more about knowing God in a Bible study this week.
A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Philippians 3:4-14

1. Summarize Paul’s resume’ in vs. 4-6. Did all of his earthly credentials have any heavenly significance? Why or why not?
2. Who was the source of Paul’s righteousness? How did he receive that righteousness?
3. According to vs. 8 and 10 it is important to know _____. Why is that knowledge important? Where do we get that special knowledge?
4. What does it mean to “press on” as disciples of Jesus (vs. 12,14)?

For Family Reflection

5. Make a list of your important family history or significant accomplishments. While this may be interesting information for yourself and others, does it have any significance in your relationship to God?
6. What is ahead (vs. 14) for all of us? Why can we be confident of our destination?

Fifth Sunday of Lent

John 11:1-53

In this passage, we see Jesus coming to the tomb of Lazarus, the grief stricken greeting from Mary and Martha, and the resurrection of their brother, Jesus' friend. In light of this story, there is a striking contrast to the end of the chapter when Caiaphas seeks a way to kill Him.

Caiaphas says, "...it is expedient that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish." He said the right thing, but he said it for the wrong reason.

Caiaphas spoke in what he thought to be in his nation's best interest. He feared Rome and what the Empire might do if it sensed rebellion in Palestine. He feared also for his own power. He had no idea that his words were a prophecy of salvation.

The high priest could not see Jesus for who He really was. Why? Caiaphas had made an assumption that he was not willing to give up. He believed he had all the answers when it came to his faith and his God. He couldn't see beyond that assumption. He couldn't see the reality of Jesus' power, love, compassion, deity, and sacrifice.

During Lent we contemplate Jesus, the Lord of our lives, but do we, like Caiaphas, make too many assumptions about what we think is true about Him? Do we often attend worship saying many words without comprehending their true meaning?

"I believe in God the Father...and in Jesus Christ, His only Son...and in the Holy Spirit...." What assumptions do we make about our God, even as we say that we "believe" in Him. Do we limit His power by deciding before we pray just what His answer will be? Do we fail to ask for His help because we assume that our quest is beneath His consideration? Do we handle our problems ourselves because we just aren't really all that sure that He will take the steps that we want? Do we fall into the trap of believing that He may not be the only way to the Father?

As Palm Sunday approaches, take an hour to consider what you really believe about Jesus. Consider what it cost God to send His Son into our world and into our lives. Pray that you will really believe in Him as the true Lord of all that you are!

Learn more about Jesus' gift to us in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Fifth Sunday of Lent

John 11:1-53

1. What other connections had Jesus had with this family (Luke 10:38-42; John 12:1-3)? What do we learn about Jesus as true man for this family connection (vs. 5)?
2. Reflect on the miracle. Why didn't Jesus hurry to Bethany when he first heard of Lazarus' illness? What made the miracle so dramatic?
3. How was the miracle received by the family? How was the miracle received by the Jewish leaders? Why were they threatened by the event? Why is this story so timely in these last days of the Lenten season?

For Family Reflection

4. "Jesus wept" (vs. 35). What does this verse tell us about Jesus? How is it comforting to know that our Jesus also cries?
5. Jesus said "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep" (vs. 11). How is death like a sleep for the Christian? How is it comforting to consider that "sleep" when we are grieving the death of a loved one?
6. What "I am" anchors this text (vs. 25)? How does this "I am" prepare us for our Easter celebration?

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Mark 10:32-45

On the way up to Jerusalem (always “up” since the city sits on top of a high hill) many disciples still followed Jesus, even as He approached His most dangerous journey. The crowds had dwindled because of His difficult teachings and the threats from the religious leaders, but many still followed Him. The apparent danger from the men that they had so long respected and feared was probably what was bothering many followers as they approached the city (vs.32).

As they walk, Jesus pulls the twelve apostles aside to speak to them about His death—not for the first time. Jesus states specifically that His death and resurrection are coming. But they really don’t understand—especially the “resurrection” part.

It would seem that they don’t understand the “death” part of the message either, or the coming danger, because two disciples come to Him with an odd request to be made at such a time.

Matthew tells us that James’ and John’s mother was also with them. You can almost see “Mom” dragging James and John to Jesus, having convinced them that they needed to keep their careers with the Messiah advancing.

Even James and John, who had ministered with Jesus, and learned from Him for three years, still thought that His kingdom would fit the contemporary Jewish belief that Messiah would lead Israel back into her glory as a military and political power in the world.

Jesus points out the suffering in the brothers’ future and also takes the opportunity to remind the disciples of the servant aspect of His ministry and that of His followers.

Before chiding James, John and their mother according to our own post-resurrection understanding, we need to face a question. How many of us have accepted Jesus’ command that we are to serve in His world rather than be served? We are empowered by His sacrificial service.

During this season of Lent, make time for God’s Word.

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Mark 10:32-45

1. What had Jesus told His disciples about His final journey to Jerusalem? How accurate was He in His prophecy?
2. Who were James and John? What had been their occupation before they followed Jesus? What request did they have of Jesus? What motivated their request? How did the other disciples react to the request of James and John?
3. What “cup” (vs. 38-39) was Jesus talking about?
4. How does Jesus define greatness? How did Jesus model greatness?

For Family Reflection

5. In what ways have you sought some special recognition like James and John? Is it okay to be recognized? When we receive honors Who should get the glory?
6. What great (deeds of service) things can you do for others in Jesus’ name?

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Luke 20:9-20

Jesus is in Jerusalem. It is His last week of teaching before His execution. The religious leaders fear and hate Him. Jesus has cleared the temple of the crooked marketplace. The people hang on every word as He teaches in the temple every day.

One day, the religious leaders (Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees) lined up to again challenge the Son of God. Jesus confronted them with a parable.

The story of the vineyard planter was a clear story of the religious leaders, Israel, the Son, and the Father. God created His nation. The nation's leaders rejected Him. He sent the prophets to them with His message of judgment and restoration but they were killed. Then He sent His Son, and they wanted to kill Him to protect their own power and false beliefs. Jesus adds that they will lose it all and implies that their blessing will be removed and passed on to others (the Gentiles).

Jesus was often blunt in His teaching and in His treatment of arrogant religious leaders. Sometimes we vent our anger and we justify our attacks and warnings on unbelievers and the unrepentant by referring to Jesus' actions, words, and even sarcasm. When we do, we are forgetting two very important things.

First, Jesus showed mercy to unbelievers. He talked with the woman at the well, explaining salvation to her. He talked with Nicodemus, a Pharisee who met Jesus at night because of the danger that visiting Jesus brought on him. Jesus healed the Roman centurion's servant and the synagogue leader's daughter. Jesus loved sinners in need of salvation and showed them mercy--honest mercy, not ignoring their sin, but forgiving it. It was the religious leaders who experienced Jesus' anger--His loving anger. Those who knew better, who were convinced they were godly, needed strict correction.

Second, we rarely are capable of loving anger. Our anger is 99% self motivated. We have been wronged; we are superior; we deserve respect. Jesus loved even those on whom He was the hardest.

Did the Pharisees understand Jesus? The gospel authors agree. As Luke records that they were enraged, not repentant—"they understood that He spoke this parable against them." May we always respond in repentance to His loving corrections.

Is your Bible wearing out from use, or is it in storage?

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Luke 20:9-20

1. See if you can interpret Jesus' parable. Who is the owner of the vineyard? What is the vineyard? Who are the tenants? Who are the servants?
2. Who is the beloved son? How does the tenants' treatment of the son predict what would happen to Jesus?
3. Read Psalm 118:22 (also written as vs. 17). How is this verse prophetic of Jesus' passion? How is this verse prophetic of Jesus' resurrection?
4. What was the reaction of Jesus' critics to this story? How is their reaction similar to the reaction of some today to Jesus' words?

For Family Reflection

5. Do we always welcome Jesus into our heart and home? What are some times that we reject Him and His word? How is God patient with us?
6. We are nearing the end of the Lenten season. How has this season been a blessing to your family and to your church family? What have you learned about Jesus' love for you? How have you shared His love with others?