Sermon 5th Sunday in Lent, Mar. 29th, 2020

Texts: Ez. 37:1-14, Rom. 8:1-11, Jn. 11:1-45

Title- “Dead to the World- Alive in Christ”

Prayer

Salutation

**The world is in chaos. War all around. Death by the sword, slaves taken into captivity, kings making bad deals, and everything collapsing. I could be talking about today, but I’m not. Yes, sickness and chaos reign these days, or else I would be with you here in the sanctuary. But I’m not talking about us, I’m talking about Israel in the time of Ezekiel the prophet. Judah had been utterly destroyed in battle and the king taken away into captivity with some of the people. A new king, Jehoiachin, had displeased the Lord and was reprimanded by Him. But now, Ezekiel stands in the valley of dry bones, literal, physical dry bones. These bones represented the utter failure of Israel to please God and live with Him securely. It had also been a spiritual war, which they had utterly lost as well. They had sinned, placing other gods before Him, and God led them into captivity, that is, those whose bones were not on the valley floor.**

**Compared to the destruction that God brought about in that time for His people, we have it pretty good even though our world looks kind of bleak right now. Look at the ground with Ezekiel. Thousands upon thousands of bones, picked clean by the birds of the air, strewn about where they perished, and dry as a handful of dust. When you see this in your lives, it is easy to become disheartened and lose all hope. There seems to be nothing that can lift you up from such despair! They knew that they had sinned. They knew that God had led them into captivity. They thought that God had cast them to ground never to bring them back to life again! They had no breath, therefore they had no life, these bones. They saw themselves as dry bones, hope lost, and cut off. And WE SHOULD, TOO! We, today, are walking in the valley, and we still don’t see the other side of it! Indeed, WE SHOULD see ourselves as dry bones! They were right to do so. So, should we. But Ezekiel had a message for all of us.**

**And Paul did for the Romans as well. He told them about sin and death, too. He boiled it down for them as clear as the images of the dry bones on the valley floor of Ezekiel. He said, “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those that live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the things of the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law;” (Vs 5-7) Like the Israelites, no Spirit, no life. Simple as that. No Spirit, we are dead in our sin. Tell me, what did you think of our contemporaries lately? I mean, what I will call, “The great toilet paper madness of 2020?” With what mind are people thinking? The mind of the flesh or of the Spirit? And it’s not just TP we are talking about is it? All the things that seem to be so, so- important. Gone. All of the things God competes with in our lives. Gone. We are not the first to do such things. You’ve probably seen the list of actions of the fall and rise of the Roman empire. We match that almost identically. Not to mention a compilation of the seven churches of Revelation!**

**Then, let’s look in the Gospel, where the good of friend of Jesus, Lazarus of Bethany, dies. Jesus is away from there about two miles. That’s all. He found out about it and didn’t go to save him. To heal as He had done to many that He didn’t know. To those He had compassion on, for all mankind suffers from sickness and death. No, He waited for death to come, just like it had in the valley of dry bones. And then, finally, He walks the two miles to Bethany with the disciples following behind. But the Grim Reaper, he had gone ahead.**

**And The Grim Reaper follows each of us. Our own death is always just two steps behind us. We conjure all sorts of things up in our minds about this or that epidemic and what do we do? We panic sometimes! But on this day, just like for the Israelites so many years before, the sisters of Lazarus have lost all hope. We are like this. We give up hope when we don’t have an immediate answer. I have to say that we are even *more* impatient. If it were today, we would call the Lord on His cell phone every two minutes asking where He was---NOW! What it shows is this; Mary and Martha had faith that Jesus could heal their brother while alive. The Israelites thought they could have life if they weren’t just dry bones in a valley. And we do, too, just if we weren’t such bad people. All mankind knows that they sin. Knows the consequence of sin. Knows that we are dead, unless *something happens*. That is: Healing through forgiveness.**

**Indeed, Mary and Martha waited and had given up hope. So had the Israelites. We do the same. We SHOULD NOT. Because Ezekiel, Paul, and Jesus tell us about another plan of the Father. And in Jesus, He showed Mary and Martha what it is all about. He first deals with her lack of understanding. That she didn’t trust that Jesus, the Messiah, could do ALL things. Ezekiel had to do the same. To place in the hearts and minds of the people- hope, instead of despair. To place in them the mind of the Spirit. To bring life!**

**Jesus, the Creator, the giver of life through the Spirit, comes to show them who He was. To give hope and life by the power of the Word. In essence, Martha shows the Lord just how the two sisters feel- lost. Because He had not come. However, in reality, they blame Jesus for the death of his friend. However, in a desperate uttering she says, “But I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.” Ah! Faith! Faith in the Spirit as the life-giving force of the universe in the Godhead of the Trinity. Her mind is set on the Spirit. And on Jesus, as He says, “Your brother will rise again.” She knows this to be true in eternity for all who believe, but she didn’t know He was talking about *that very minute*! She said, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” To bring her and all of us hope He replied, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” She replied, “Yes Lord: I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God, who is coming into the world.”**

**He said all these things before going to the tomb. He had stopped to rest somewhere. Imagine being with Jesus on such a journey as this. You’re tired and worn out from all that has happened. You’ve been crying and had gone through a funeral and had people around you for four days wailing and keeping you awake. You have resigned yourself to the fact that nothing can change. Death has come. But then, Jesus says these things to you. Wait! Did He mean what He said? Now? So, she goes ahead to her sister and tells her He is on the way. She expects her sister Mary to come to this place and hear the good news as well. Away from all the crowds. But that doesn’t happen. The crowds follow. That was what Jesus was expecting. He did all things with a purpose. This is evident by His waiting until the fourth day. To prove that Lazarus was truly dead under Levitical belief. And to show, the crowds, to show US, that He was, God Incarnate. The Giver of Life. The Messiah of Israel.**

**Martha and Mary arrive where Martha had met Him before. You can tell they were sisters as she expresses the same thoughts and feelings to Jesus. And Jesus weeps. I love that two-word verse. In it, it proves to me that He knows. It was a comfort to me in January, on the day I celebrated my ordination, but also the day my Father-in-law was brought into glory with Jesus. He knows how we feel. He, in His submission to the Father, became just as us, flesh and bones, susceptible to what we are really talking about here in the valley —Death. And one day in the near future, on Good Friday, He would experience that for all of us. Taking on the sin that causes death for all of us. Placing Himself on a cross and being in a tomb three days, BUT then rising in glory, the first fruits of those that believe in Him. But He’s here to do that for another this day. To bring to life the man Lazarus, whom He loved, just like He loves us all. And He showed that when He called out, “Lazarus, come out!”, just how it will be for all of us! He will shout on the last day, “Awake, O Sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!” Lazarus came out! WE will come out! Oh, what blessed hope! And the people marveled and believed that day. And we who believe marvel as well for God’s great gift to us in Christ!**

**The Israelites were restored to their land and the temple was rebuilt by what were dead dry bones. Israel, the people of God. God promised and He said He would do it. He did it. He restored them, physically and spiritually, and the Temple, even when they thought they were dead. He does that for us, the Temple of God, who live in and by the Spirit of God. All this was accomplished by rising the third day after His death for us on the cross, where sin was defeated, the devil defeated, death was defeated; for us, by His holy blood spilled. He promises life eternal with Him and He will do it for all who believe. He has promised it! In the meanwhile, we don’t fret, or worry like Mary and Martha or the lost all about us who have their minds set on the things of the flesh. No, for we have our hearts and minds set on Jesus, the Giver of Life!**

**And in whose name, we rely upon and pray. Amen.**