

Rev. David R. Solum
5th Sunday in Lent
Passion Sunday
Immanuel Lutheran, Michigan City
Ezekiel 37:1-14
John 11:1-53

You might feel like a pile of dried up bones right now. “Can these bones live?” Can I recover my job? Will my business survive? Will I keep from getting sick? Will our hospitals be able to cope with all the patients? Will my kids keep up with their schoolwork? Will our nation recover? We are all tired and stressed, and it’s hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Think now of Ezekiel’s exiled congregation. Their entire nation was destroyed; the capital raised to the ground; the temple of God’s presence, obliterated, and all the sacred vessels were melted down and taken to Babylon. The people were slaves in a faraway land and there was nothing to return to. Jerusalem promised nothing but death and ruin. They were as hopeless as a pile of dried up bones. “Can these bones live?” The answer should’ve been, “Certainly not!”

If we put our hope in the government, the stock market and economy, our business and work, bodily health, finished school assignments, or in any of the works and abilities of man, we will not have any peace and joy right now. We will easily be discouraged and anxious and frightened. Paul writes in Romans 8, “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” How many of you have significantly increased your prayers and daily reading of the Scriptures during this time of testing? Or have you spent far more time listening to the news, watching Netflix, and browsing Facebook? I wonder how many social media addictions will be started or made worse by this lockdown. Now, some of you parents

would respond, “No, we’re spending all day and night on e-learning assignments!” Teachers feel that way too. And if you work in any of those “essential” businesses, you are also probably working around the clock. Do you have a time when you just put everything down, whether you’re done or not, to read God’s Word and pray? If you don’t, then you will really struggle to find peace, because there will always be work to do. But only in Christ, can you find work that is finished, accomplished and completed entirely for you, work which has saved you from your works and promises you rest.

Not only so, but the people putting themselves at risk for our bodily needs need our prayers. We should not neglect our prayers for all who are truly suffering in this crisis, lest we let the devil reek all the havoc he wants. But a single prayer of God’s righteous saints can drive the devil away. Remember our government, medical workers, emergency personnel, all workers of essential businesses, your church, teachers, and the sick and poor, and others in your prayers. Utilize well your priestly access to God and make war against this evil calamity, remembering Christ’s promise, “Whatever you ask in My name, I will give to you.”

“Can these bones live?” Ezekiel answered, “O Lord God, you know.” He didn’t presume to know how the Lord would work or what He would do, but that the Lord could even make those bones live was not a question, nor was there any doubt that God was still at work with His grace and mercy. This is an appropriate prayer for us right now. “O Lord God, you know.” In times like these, when we don’t know what tomorrow will bring, it is good to know that the *Lord knows*. The Lord knows what He is doing and He knows our future. And this is about more than just God being in control, but that God is ruling over all things through the redemptive work of

His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. That means that His plan is to prosper everyone who trusts in Him, so that you are filled with good things for this life and for eternity.

The Lord knows our needs before we even ask. “O Lord God, You know,” recognizes that we can’t know the hidden plans of God, but that God is capable of and is continually doing the impossible for us. He is giving life to our dead, sinful bodies. He is giving redemption to those who are captive to sin and death. He is giving hope to the hopeless, comfort to those who mourn, and joy to the sorrowful. He is strengthening and protecting, giving wisdom and ability to all those who are working extra hard right now to care for our bodily wellbeing. He is also sanctifying your work, whether at home or in your business, so that your lives will show forth His love and be of great service to your neighbor.

The bones of Israel lived again. They found hope and life and joy in the promises of God fulfilled. God used the Persian King Cyrus to release the Jews and send them home. He gave them all the funds and supplies to rebuild the entire city of Jerusalem and its temple. God redeemed them like they could have never imagined! How much more will God care for you, who are baptized into the name of His Son Jesus Christ? And how much more will He use you for His glory? You have the promises of God’s everlasting, triumphant and glorious kingdom!

God has kept His promise to you in Jesus Christ. For your sake, God used Caiaphas, the high priest, who loved his own government more than the government of God, to prophesy that Jesus would die, not only for the nation, but for all people who were scattered abroad! God used the unbelieving Jews, the heathen Romans, and the depraved soldiers to bring about His gracious

will for you. What good could come from a crucifixion? Can these bones live, bones that have been bruised and beaten, bones that are dead, and even more, that have been burned with the wrath of God for the sins of all people? The most wretched and cursed man of all history became the world's salvation. The work of your salvation is finished in Him.

Christ's bones did live, never to die again. Christ is risen and glorified. And the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, in your baptism. Can your bones live? They do and they will! Christ has prophesied to your bones; His creating Word has entered you. You stand clothed with His righteousness, His innocence and holiness. Your bones serve the gracious will of God, to bring His love and life to others. And no matter what happens to your bones, they will live again at the resurrection and never die. Your hope is alive in Jesus Christ!

What good could Jesus do with the stinking corpse of Lazarus? He raised him from the dead to show you the power that is already at work in you. Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in Him will live and never die.

What good could Jesus do with a coronavirus outbreak? O Lord, You know. And we will put our trust in You. For You will deliver our souls from death, our eyes from tears, and our feet from stumbling. We are precious in Your sight, and You will govern and preserve us in body and soul forevermore. Amen.