

Sermon—7th Sunday After Pentecost and Feast of the Prophet Ezekiel

St George Orthodox Church—Albany, NY

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MATTHEW 9:27-35

At that time, as Jesus passed by, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly charged them, "See that no one knows it." But they went away and spread his fame through all that district. As they were going away, behold, a dumb demoniac was brought to him. And when the demon had been cast out, the dumb man spoke; and the crowds marveled, saying, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel." But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons. And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people.

In the name of the F, S, HS—one God—Amen!

Have you ever had the experience where you weren't sure how it was possible that something could work out?

Today we remember the holy prophet Ezekiel. One of the great prophets. He was a priest as well as a prophet and he had one such experience...

He was brought to a large plain by God and this plain was filled with dried human bones (Ek 37.1) and God asks him "Can these bones live?"

Now imagine...you are looking at these bones and someone says to you, "can these bones live?" What would your response be?

Sometimes things can seem like they are simply impossible. Like there is no way that something can happen and like all hope is lost. And what do we do in these situations?

How do we behave? Honestly, it can be easy to despair. It can be easy to say I am alone, no one cares for me, God has forgotten me, God has forgotten his Church, God has forgotten the world. All you have to do is watch the news for a few minutes and this despair can begin to slither into your mind and before long it has a stranglehold on our thoughts and all we can think about is how bad things are. This despair literally chokes the life out of us because once it is in our mind we keep feeding it. We keep watching the news and we keep thinking the same destructive thoughts and saying the same things and acting the same way

We dont enjoy things like we did before, we complain more and everything seems to be hopeless.

And then what happens?...Despair chokes the life out of us. Slowly we are squeezed tighter and tighter by despair if we do not act to be delivered from it. Before we know it we are wrapped in deadly despair...we are like those bones in the plain that Ezekiel saw. We are lifeless and and seemingly without hope.

And so we dont really have to imagine all that much what Ezekiel saw because we have lived it. We have either had the experience of despair or seen those who have and probably for most of us it is both.

So what can be done?

Well, lets return to the story with Ezekiel. When God asks Ezekiel can these bones live, Ezekiel says, "Lord, you know if they can live" (Ek 37.3) then the Lord tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones and he does and as he does the bones begin to shake and come together and muscle is formed on them and skin covers them

And then God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the spirit to come upon the bones and to fill them with life and the Spirit of God fills them with life.

It seemed as if there was no hope but with our God even the dead can rise back to life. There is not a state of sin and death that our Lord cannot call us back from. He reaches into our lives and heals us and raises us up because we know that He is Life itself and that He himself rose from the dead.

Our Lord has destroyed death

Death is no longer able to hold us in that stranglehold provided that we have something that is very important....

Provided that we have faith. We heard today in the gospel that the blind men cried out after the Lord and said "have mercy on us Son of David" and so we see that they exhibit faith and then when our Lord asks them, "do you believe that I am able to do this" they say, "yes, Lord"

What do we say when our Lord asks us this question? What do we say when our Lord asks us, "do you believe I am able to do this?"

Do we say "yes, Lord, I believe"

Now you might be thinking...but the bones did not exhibit any faith. Why do I need to exhibit faith? And you are right the bones were not asked if they believed but Ezekiel was. Ezekiel was asked "can these bones live" and his response is one of faith...you know Lord.

And so we see that by Ezekiel's faith in the power of God, these bones are made to live again. Now, think about this? The faith of another person is strong enough to raise another from death to life.

Again, we see how we are not only responsible for ourselves, but we are responsible for others also and not just here in this life, but we are responsible to some degree for their salvation.

We see this often in the scriptures—that by the faith of others, someone is healed—the 4 friends who bring their friend and let their friend down through the roof, the father who says to the Lord, I believe help my unbelief, the centurion who asks that his servant be healed—all these show faith for someone else to be healed.

So when we find ourselves in the coils of despair (or any other sin for that matter) what do we do? How can we release ourselves?

We show our faith to God. And how do we show our faith to God?

Well sometimes we think about faith in the wrong way. We think about faith as a possession that we either have or we don't have. But this is not what faith is. Faith is a relationship. We are in a relationship with God and the degree to which the relationship is strong is the degree to which our faith is strong.

Think about a friendship. Someone says to you, "I have this friend and they are a great friend." And you say, "wow what a wonderful thing. You must talk to that friend often" and they say, "no," and then you say, "oh, well, you must do a lot with that friend even if you don't talk all that much." And they say, "no," and you say, "oh, well you must write a lot of letters back and forth" and they say, "no." Are those two people really friends?

They can call each other their friends but you have to do the things that friends do in order actually have a friend.

It is the same for us with our faith. When we say we have faith we are saying we have a relationship with Christ. Again we can use the analogy of friends. There are different levels of friendship. If you talk to someone once every year that is a very different level of friendship than talking to someone every day and sharing all your thoughts and feelings with that person.

So the more we strengthen our relationship with Christ. The stronger our faith becomes. And how do we strengthen our relationship with Christ?

We spend time with him. We pray, we read the scriptures, we partake of his body and blood and we minister to those who are in need around us. The more we do this, the more we “get to know Christ” so to say. And the more we get to know Christ the more we will see the miracles he will do in our own lives and the more we see the miracles he does in our own lives the easier it will be for us to say, “I believe Lord that you are able to do this.” Whatever that may be. Of course the fact that we know something about how our good and close friend does not necessarily mean that He will do it. It just means that we know that he can of course do what we are asking Him.

The good thing about faith though is that because it is an expression of a relationship it means that we have influence. It means that we can change our friends mind, so to say. We can say, “hey, can you do this favor for me?”

So our faith consists of the strength of our relationship with Christ. So when our Lord says to us, “do you believe I am able to deliver you from despair?” And we respond, “yes” our yes consists in life lived not a single moment where we possess faith.

Show your faith

Live a life in Christ

Pray

Fast

Give

Confess

And our Lord will deliver you from every snare of the devil.

Glory to our Lord Jesus Christ, His unbegotten Father and the all-holy and good and life-giving Spirit. Amen!