

Holy Saturday Sermon

Ezekiel 37:1-14

1 The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. **2** He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. **3** He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "Sovereign LORD, you alone know." **4** Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! **5** This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. **6** I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'" **7** So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. **8** I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. **9** Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" **10** So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army. **11** Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'" **12** Therefore prophecy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. **13** Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. **14** I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.'

Daniel 3:1-29

1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. **2** He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. **3** So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it. **4** Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: **5** As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. **6** Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace." **7** Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every

language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. **8** At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. **9** They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever! **10** Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, **11** and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. **12** But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon--Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego--who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up." **13** Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, **14** and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? **15** Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" **16** Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. **17** If the God we serve is able to deliver us, then he will deliver us from the blazing furnace and from Your Majesty's hand. **18** But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." **19** Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual **20** and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. **21** So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. **22** The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, **23** and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. **24** Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty." **25** He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." **26** Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, **27** and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them. **28** Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent

his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. **29** Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

Sermon – “For No Other God Can Save In This Way”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father,
God's Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit:
Amen.

“He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell.” On this holiest of Saturdays, the day upon which we await to anoint the body of Jesus, we sit in this tension. The innocent Lamb of God, the One who created all good things, “descended into hell.” We, along with the disciples, remain outside the tomb where he was buried, away from the cross where he died, and wonder how we got this guy so wrong. Only a few

days ago we shouted with the crowd, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" Our hosannas, however, seem to have died with the last breath of Jesus. The one who should have overthrown Herod, who should have deposed Pilate, is now just beginning to decompose himself. Since it is the Sabbath, we await the morning so that we might dress his precious body, to give our friend and fallen revolutionary one last swath of dignity before he is gone forever.

Though we await with assurance the resurrection of our Lord, the sensation of that first Saturday was failure and fear, death and despair. For Mary Magdalene, Mary the Mother of James, and Joana to carry burial spices to the tomb was to admit

defeat. For the eleven disciples to huddle together in a home rather than face the death of their leader and friend, was even worse, a denial of their connection to his life, much less his suffering or death.

How often do we declare Jesus dead in our lives? How often do we deny our connection to Christ's life and death? Whether because we feel we do not need him or we feel He has left us, we often carry burial spices in preparation to put Him forever away. When Christ appears irrelevant due to the power of secular forces like materialism or individualism, how often do we hide our allegiance with Him?

And yet, we vigil not because of our fear, but because of His faithfulness. We vigil not because of

our abandonment, but because of His presence.

And so as we wonder and mourn, as we struggle with the fact that the Son of God is dead, something else is going on, something that works against our fear and failure, that works to correct our sinfulness and our struggles. A nearly imperceptible movement of the Lord is at hand, though we cannot yet grasp it. In the depths of hell, in the dejection of death, where even angels fear to tread, Christ stands within the fiery furnace, and brings life into the flames meant for the destruction. Christ walks into the valley of the shadow of death, where dry bones pave the hellish highways, and speaks a word that draws sinew upon skeleton, speaks a word that wraps flesh upon dead frames, speaks a word that gives a pulse to still hearts

and breath to still lungs. As we vigil, the Lord invigorates the dead.

When the Apostle's Creed claims he descended into hell, it speaks of Christ's descent into the depths of humanity's division from God. Christ harrowed the gates of hell to protect those tossed in the fiery furnace, to deliver all those relegated to the trash heap of Gehenna, to remind the lost that they are not forgotten. On this holiest of Saturdays, while we mourn the death of Jesus in the relative safety of our own homes, Jesus breaks into the realms of despair, forsaking his own safety and instead bearing the blaze for us, for those who deserve to burn. By his very presence, Jesus deflects the force of the flames, and delivers from hell Shadrach, Meshach,

Abednego, and all those throughout history who have rejected out without the hope of a savior.

On this night, precisely when all seems lost, when Jesus' death seems final, when the light of the world seem lost in the shadows, God begins a greater work in the darkness. The dead Savior now knits together bones of the dead. Once dry and desperate, the God who knit together Adam and Eve from the dirt now takes these dusty skeletons and gives them new flesh, just as Christ took on flesh Himself. On Holy Saturday, a once deceased horde becomes an army victorious in the cross of Christ, for as He prepares to rise, so too does all humanity. The outcasts find inclusion in Christ who the world cast out. The dead become alive in Christ who the world killed.

This all seems nothing short of absurd. It seems too mysterious to be true. But on this holiest of Saturdays, the mystery is precisely where we find life. The mystery is that God became human for a purpose. God died for a purpose. To borrow a phrase from Nebuchadnezzar, tonight we find out that "no other God can save in this way," because while we mourn our loss, Jesus is at work again giving life to the lifeless. Even if we cannot quite see it yet, even if the darkness remains where the light should reign, He will rise. Amen.