

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Ezekiel 37:1–14**

**Sermon: “Just Breath”**

The Scripture readings for today prepare us in marvelous ways for the central focus of Holy Week and the entire Christian faith: Christ’s death and resurrection. Christ crucified, Christ resurrection!

Psalm 130, our psalm for today places us in the right posture for confessing this central proclamation: ***“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord”*** (Ps 130:1), a reality greatly enhanced when contemplating the bones and graves mentioned in the Old Testament Reading. But for us today facing the trials and uncertainty of the world around us, we need these words of comfort and peace. Just as the Lord’s word is emphasized in Ezekiel 37 as that which brings life out of death, so also does Psalm 130 express hope in the same: ***“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope”*** (130:5). While the psalmist ends on a note of confidence that the Lord will indeed redeem Israel (130:7–8), Ezekiel receives one of the most remarkable visions of what exactly that means.

With much talk of both physical and spiritual death, life, and the role of the Spirit, Paul in the Epistle (Romans 8:1–11) is practically writing a commentary on the Ezekiel text from the perspective of Christ’s resurrection. Verse 11 illustrates this quite nicely: ***“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”***

And the raising of Lazarus in the Gospel provides not only a powerful display of how our Lord triumphs over death but also a foreshadowing of what will soon happen to him and to all those who live and believe in him (John 11:26).

Every single time we inhale, our diaphragms contract and move downward so that the space in our chest cavity increases. The lungs then expand, air is pulled in, and with help of a fancy protein called hemoglobin, oxygen goes to the blood. While this is all going on, carbon dioxide moves into the lungs and is then forced out when we exhale.

The whole thing is pretty amazing, and there are hundreds of more details about this thing we call “breathing” that I left out. Given that the average person takes about 25,000 breaths per day, it’s no wonder that we should check in with our breathing every now and then.

In our text today, God shows the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel a vision that makes quite dramatic how important this simple thing of breathing is; it brings the resurrection of the whole army of Israel! Ezekiel envisions those who were very dead breathing again, physically. But he’s also seeing what breath can mean spiritually—with a definite pun intended there. More on that later. Ultimately, of course, Ezekiel’s vision is a picture of what Jesus does for us: Jesus gives us the breath of resurrected life.

God’s people haven’t been breathing very well! We were born into broken breathing. Our breathing doesn’t work the way that it should (various lung problems and for some COVID-19).

We “inhale” all sorts of things that harm us physically (drugs, too much food, too much sitting). We “inhale” all sorts of things that harm us spiritually (greed for a BMW, a corner office, a better look, a new partner).

This kind of breathing has dried us to the core. Israel breathing all the wrong things has resulted in their destruction and captivity in Babylon. God gives Ezekiel a vision of what that means for them spiritually. It’s as if they are breathless, “very dry” bones. Ezekiel was forced to take a good look at the situation, just as God’s Law forces us to take a close look at our own condition (Romans 3:20). We have been taking into our nostrils the breath of death: ***“Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.”*** On our own, we are deep down in the lowest of low places, lying lifeless in the valley of death.

But a breath of fresh air is on the way. It begins with the Word of the Lord (vs 3–4). The Word is living and active (Hebrews 4:12). And where the Word is, there is also the Spirit:

***“Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live”*** (Ezekiel 37:9). Spirit and breath, it’s the same word. Because where the Spirit is, there is life. ***“I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live”*** (v 5). ***“I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live”*** (v 14).

The Word and the Spirit give us back the breath of life that we lost in the fall. Notice, it’s just like the way God created Adam: first he formed him, then he breathed into him the breath of life (Genesis 2:7).

So now God calls his people, us to take a breather. Jesus gives us the breath of resurrected life. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks, ***“Lazarus, come out,”*** and Lazarus receives a new breath of life. In fact, ***“an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear [Jesus’] voice and come out”*** (John 5:28–29). The breath that Jesus gives re-creates both soul and body. Remember how very physical the resurrection was that Ezekiel saw (Ezekiel 37:6–10).

The breath that Jesus gives reaches even those in the grave (vs 12–13). This breath of resurrected life happens because Jesus gave up his breath on the cross. ***“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold the curtain in the temple was torn to two from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.”*** (Matthew 27:50-53)

Now this breath of resurrected life is given in the Divine Service. Every Absolution is a new breath for a new day. Taking in the preached Word both kills false hopes (thus making “slain ones”) and gives life to the dead (Romans 4:17). With this breath in us, God sees us as already raised up with Christ in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6).

This is our sure comfort and hope, because ***“if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you”*** (Romans 8:11).

Breathing is a big deal, and today God calls us all to receive the breath of resurrected life that comes only from Jesus. So, take a breather! In him is a breath for the weary and heavy-laden, for the crushed in spirit, for the despised and lowly. The breath he gives enters into the deepest dryness of our lives and revitalizes us beyond all understanding. Yes, in Jesus is a breath of life that extends even beyond the grave, so breathe easy, my friends.

Amen