

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

God gave the Prophet Jeremiah a Word to speak to Judah that would shake them to their very core. He rebuked the people, because they had turned to the worship of the created things rather than the Creator. He dared them to bring the bones of the princes, priests and prophets and the inhabitants of Jerusalem out of their graves, and to lay them before the sun and moon and stars.

He bid them lay the remains of their leaders before the objects of their worship, the creation. The God of Life, who at the same time gave Ezekiel the vision of the resurrection of the bones in the valley, chastised Judah through Jeremiah, because the sun and moon and stars can not raise anyone to life.

The proof is in the resurrection. God alone can raise the dead, as Ezekiel's vision proves. But bones laid out before sun and moon and stars simply turn to dust. As God chastised Judah for their unfaithfulness, He reminded them that their bones would be neither gathered nor buried, they would simply become refuse on the face of the earth.

Then, with the image of those lifeless bones testifying against the people, God gave the Prophet the lament you heard read this morning: "Why has this people slidden back...? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return. I listened and heard, but they do not speak aright." So the Word of condemnation spoken over Judah is a Word of condemnation for our society. We have slidden further back, held to greater deceit. And most speak against God and the clear teachings of Holy Scripture.

Man is so corrupt, so totally fallen, that he makes idols even of the good gifts of God. As Aaron smelted the gold of Egypt at the foot of Sinai to fashion a god that he could control, so did the men of Corinth make idols of the gift of tongues, of the gift of prophecy, of wisdom and understanding. They turned what should have been blessings into marks of personal pride and individual skill, making good gifts into mammon which profits nothing, and stood only to accuse them.

In worshipping the creature, man is simply making himself god. So in our time perversion is called normal. Deviancy is called love. Even male and female, the most basic of distinctions, are confused. Infanticide is legal and promoted. God is ridiculed in the public square. Like the men in St. Luke's account of the blind man, the unbelieving world tries to silence those who cry out to the only True God, the Triune God. In blindness false gods are held to be equal to the True God. And man looks to himself for the ultimate answers, which is spiritual blindness that leads to death.

The truth is, of course, that in trouble, in danger, in sickness, in death, the man who has made himself his own god has nowhere to turn. His frailty and weakness and ignorance are revealed for all to see. The man who makes gods of created things has no hope. The man who follows the doctrines of this fallen world rather than the Word of the Only True God, with apostate Judah and every sinner, stands convicted. And his bones will testify, for no man can overcome death.

Every man who has transgressed, you, O Sinner, must hear the Prophet's searing Words, and must stand before the neatly arrayed bones of the false prophets and idolatrous priests and prideful leaders and backsliding people, and witness in them his own death and eternal separation from God.

But the blind man saw. He knew. He had a wisdom that is not of this world. He had hope. He did not turn to the healers of his age, to the false prophets or sinful priests or backsliding people. He turned his darkened eyes to the True Light. That's what faith does. He cried out, saying "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" He used His Messianic Title, calling on Him as the long-promised Savior. And when they tried to silence him, he cried out all the more.

He cried out to the Only True God, to the only One who can truly heal, to the Source of true Wisdom, to the One who is truly merciful. And the Lord heard his cry. The Son of God, Mary's Son, the Son of David, stopped. He stood still. He commanded the blind man to be brought to Him. Already knowing his heart, the God Who Heals, the God Who Sees, the God Who Provides asked the man "What do you want me to do for you?" And immediately upon the answer of faith, the man saw. He saw Jesus. Because that's what faith does.

And this day, in mercy, the same God brings the same question to bear upon you, you who acknowledging your sin and your wretchedness have drawn nigh unto Him, believing that He can cure you. He gives you the question, and the answer. "What do you want me to do for you?", He asks.

And then He Himself gives the answer: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again." That is what God does for you. It is what you needed most.

The proof is in the resurrection. God alone can give life. God alone can raise the dead. And dying for you, crucified and buried for your sins, God the Son took up His life again. He laid it down willingly, no one took it from Him. And He alone had the power to take it up again. The Holy One did not see corruption. His bones were not arrayed before sun and moon and stars to return to the dust. His tomb is empty. He lives, and all who believe in Him have the forgiveness He won, and the resurrection and eternal life that He promises.

"The greatest of these is love", the Apostle writes. Faith and hope are yours, dear Christian, because of the boundless love your Lord extends to you from His cross and empty tomb. Faith is yours because the Spirit of the Living God makes your body His temple. Faith is yours because you are baptized into Christ in the Name of the Triune God. Faith is yours, that you, with the seeing blind man, look to Christ, your Lord, your Savior, the One who has promised to deliver you from death unto eternal life. Therein lies your hope.

By faith you hear and receive the Word of the Lord, the Saving, Strong Word. And by that Word you know Christ, of whom all the Prophets prophesied, to whom the Scriptures testify. And

knowing Christ, knowing that He is true God and true Man, knowing that He is the promised Messiah, David's Son and David's Lord, knowing that He is the One who died and rose for you, you have true Wisdom.

And so you have hope, O Redeemed of Christ. The greatest of these is love. God has shown you His boundless love, that His love be yours, and that His love be extended through you to those around you.

Your Lord hears you, just as He heard the blind man. He hears your prayers. He knows your heart. He provides for you. He gives you His Word. He heals you. And by His Holy Sacraments He creates and sustains faith, hope and love in you. By faith you see Him, as did the blind man, although now dimly as in a glass, now in Bread and Wine, but soon clearly as you stand before Him on the Day of Resurrection.

So take and eat, take and drink, dear Christian. You have the forgiveness and the Gospel Promise of the Lord of Life. Christ has healed you. Your faith has made you well.

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