

Becky and I can be quite competitive. Whether it's a card game or certain board games, maybe a backyard game, the challenge can really bring out some fierce determination between the two of us. So, for Herschel's birthday last year, the theme was the hungry caterpillar, and we decided that we would have a baking competition to see who was designing the cake for the party. Now if you've had Becky's cookies or squares or loaves or cakes, or really anything she produces in the kitchen then you already know how this turns out, but in my mind I really did have a chance.

You see, when I was younger there was actually a short period when I wanted to be a baker. I was watching the Food Network from a very young age and baking shows always seemed so wild and wonderful, so I thought I'd give something a try. A friend and I even tried to make a baked Alaska (you literally put ice cream in the oven). It didn't go well. But even though the passion to become a baker fell to the side, I've seen a lot of baking shows. Becky and I watch them still, so I know the correct theories. I had some ideas about how to modify the batter to bring out certain aspects of the cake. I knew you had to ice it a certain way before putting on the details. I even knew, kind of, what I wanted it to look like in my mind. But from about the second step of the bake you could really tell that this was turning from a mess into a bigger mess.

As we neared the end, the question was "is there any way to save this pile of slop?" But there was no way I could salvage it, let alone compete with the lovely cake that was being made by my wife.

Looking at what was before me, it seemed completely hopeless—I was helpless. Thankfully, she had a good cake for the party. Thankfully it was something as trivial as a cake, so nothing to do with my sense of worth. I got over the shame pretty quickly with this one.

But that's not always the case, is it? Sometimes we look at a situation in our lives and wonder how anything good can come out of it. Is there any way that we can turn it around? We had an idea of what our jobs would look like, our marriages, our families, our health, our faith, but looking at where we've found ourselves, we're certainly not where we thought our ideas and efforts were going to take

us. We might not be quite so obviously helpless as the bones laying out there in the desert, but to ask God “can these bones live?” isn’t a far-off question. Can this mess of life be turned around? Can you make good out of my ruptured relationships? Can you redeem this career path that I thought would be glorious but is really just drudgery? Can you turn around my health even when the doctors seem clueless? Can you help me to believe like I once did?

The answer Ezekiel gets regarding the object lesson of the nation of bones is a resounding “Yes.” Ezekiel isn’t so bold as to answer God’s question this way, but when he turns the question around on God, the Lord God is able to say He can take these dry bones and add once again tendon and muscle and organ, including the skin to wrap up this life once more. But the promise does not end with the simple appearance of life, renewed corpses walking around just waiting to die once more. No, into these bodies He gives His breath. He re-vitalizes them, just as He once brought life to Adam and Eve. By the very breath of God, they live.

Now, this prophecy is precisely that. There has never been a mass resurrection—not of a completely obliterated population that just rises from their mass grave. This is a telling picture of what happens to faithless Israel when they finally return to faith. Similar to what is happening today as we celebrate Pentecost. As the followers of Christ are meeting, waiting for the promise that Jesus spoke of, the Holy Spirit, the breath of God, you might say, rushes in and tongues of fire fall on their head. And they begin speaking, as led by God, and this calamity and chaos brings about a lot of people to see the action. A lot of Jews who had been dispersed and now spoke the languages of the local world. Jews who had been cut off from their homeland, Jews who felt hopeless, maybe even lifeless as they awaited God’s promises to be fulfilled. These Jews begin hearing the mighty works of God—they hear these in their own tongues so they can comprehend precisely what is said and rejoice in it.

Now these who are dead in their sin, cut off and hopeless, they are revitalized by the preaching of the wonders of God, all leading to the preaching of Christ, Him crucified and risen and now ascended.

That is precisely what the Holy Spirit led to, and always will lead to because as Jesus promised, this is His Spirit, witnessing to Him. As Peter continues his sermon on the day of Pentecost we hear about Jesus' perfect life of love, we hear of His sacrifice for those who killed Him, we hear of Him now reigning at the right hand of God. When it seems like Christ has literally up and left His followers with only the promise of a Helper, He sends His Holy Spirit to be their Helper, to give them the wisdom and strength and courage and even the words to witness of Him, to praise Him and preach Him among the nations.

When the Church, newly formed, seemed to be on shaky ground, He breathes His life breath into them so that they can preach this Gospel to those whose lives seem to be on shaky ground. He continues to breathe His life where all hope seems to be lost. That is, He continues to work resurrection out of death, just as done first and foremost in Christ our Lord.

The supernatural day of Pentecost, focussing on the gift of the Holy Spirit, just like the vision given to Ezekiel of this mighty power of God over death, in these moments just as in all working of God throughout Scripture, even though we don't see Christ in their midst doing this work like He did with the lepers and the hungry crowds and the possessed, it all stems from His work, it all points to what He has done, it all relies on His promises and His power. It is all Jesus.

And the same is true here and now today. There aren't two categories of the works of God—those done by Jesus for our life and death and salvation and those done by the Holy Spirit, a more supernatural and mysterious group of works. We don't need to ask the Holy Spirit for mysterious wisdom when we don't know the way forward with a career or with a significant other, and then ask Jesus for forgiveness for our sins. Every gift of every good thing is a blessing of God the Father, given by the Spirit, for the sake of Christ and ours only because He is worthy. The Spirit is with us to witness every gift and truth that is ours because of Christ.

And these gifts are ours even if it doesn't always look or feel like it. In Ezekiel's vision, the revived bones cry out that they are cut off, their hope gone but the Lord God says "O my people, your

graves will be opened and you will be raised up to receive my own Spirit and you will know that I am the Lord.”

“O my people” you gathered here today. Though you have not taken your last breath and gone to your grave, waiting and hoping that He comes to raise you once again, you need not wait for your resurrection. You have already been to your watery grave, drowned alongside the crucified Christ, and as He was raised on the third day, so you were raised up and you were given this, His gift-proclaiming Holy Spirit to be yours, with you forever.

That doesn't mean we pray and my cakes become glorious creations, or our academic struggles disappear, or our grief just evaporates, or joy and peace become all we experience. Sometimes He is gracious and miraculously acts that speedily. But the normal route is much slower, much less spectacular, but it is wholly true and reliable. As we hear of His promises, the Holy Spirit sustains our faith through all trials. So His promise of life becomes our hope. His assurance of forgiveness becomes our lifeline. His joy and peace and hope are what we pray for and look for and will see in bursts and moments that we would know they are ours forever. We ask for wisdom and know He gives it, so we trust and contemplate and discuss and we go forward in faith. We need healing and so we pray and we get treatment and we know that our Lord will care, for a time, for our flesh here on this side of the grave, but it'll be perfect on the other side.

As the Holy Spirit comes to you, again and again, He brings to you all that Christ has won for you. Every time you hear the proclamation of the deeds of God, in preaching and in His Word and in the sacraments, once again you receive these great gifts for you to praise Him alongside all His people, and indeed proclaim your Lord, your salvation, to the nations.

In His name.

Amen.