

John 1:43-50; Ezekiel 37:1-14

Faith Sharing: “*A Powerful Relationship with the Trinity*”

From Ezekiel, we have this marvelous prophecy – that God will give life to dead bones! It’s a popular passage reminding ancient Israel of God’s great work, for God indeed restored His covenant and their place of privilege in the Promised Land!

I wanted us to hear how God answered His own question to Ezekiel: “Can these bones live again?” God said to Ezekiel, “*Speak to the bones! and say, ‘Dry bones, listen to the word of the LORD!’*”⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Look! I am going to breathe into you and make you live again!⁶ I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.”

And it was as God’s message was announced that the dry bones came together and ...the flesh and muscle and tendon and ...life were given to those who were dead!

The power of God gives new life!

Let’s bring this forward about 500 more years, to Jesus. We find Him in the gospel story calling His disciples.

READING John 1:43-50

Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Come, be My disciple.”⁴⁴ Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter’s hometown.

⁴⁵ Philip went off to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

⁴⁶ “Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from there?”

“Just come and see for yourself,” Philip said.

⁴⁷ As they approached, Jesus said, “Here comes an honest man – a true son of Israel.”

⁴⁸ “How do You know about me?” Nathanael asked.

And Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.”

⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, “Teacher, You are the Son of God – the King of Israel!”

⁵⁰ Jesus asked him, “Do you believe all this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.”

Philip brings Nathanael to Jesus. It was a tough sell. Philip told Nathanael who he thought Jesus was. Nathanael thought that was ridiculous! But *Jesus* transforms doubt – Jesus pours faith into our lives! Always Jesus! and this is the great thing about the conversion experience. We can rely on Christ to make the *connection* when we feel timid or unsure. Jesus speaks to the heart of the one we bring to Him – then ...and now!

In fact, the Bible tells us that God’s Word is the effective agent that transforms lives! God’s Word spoken through God the Son! God’s Word spoken through Ezekiel, His messenger.

- God said, “The rain and snow come down from the heavens and ...cause the grain to grow, producing seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry. It is the same with My word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it.” (Isaiah 55:10-11)

And God’s word spoken through you – produces dramatic change!

- So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

(Romans 10:17)

- How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” (Isaiah 52:7)

How great it is when God’s word is heard! We want to tell the story of Jesus Christ – so that others find faith to trust God in their lives. The Spirit of Christ will have an effect on others – if we help *express* the word!

So what are we going to tell?

We may find it easier to talk about the activity of the Church – the plans and programs that are coming up ...but to share *Why* this is important?

The KEY question for us today: What difference does it make in your own life that you’re a Christian?

There it is. I’m asking.

Kind of a tough question, isn’t it?

You may want to answer ...by talking about our building and the things that go on in here, about your friends and the important life you’ve found with them and the ministries we do. And we believe these ministries can lead to faith in God and a prayer life, but sometimes people have to endure an awful lot of “Church information” before they get to know Jesus!

Our purpose is to help new men, women, and children begin a life of relationship with God. Church supports that relationship in many ways. But attending Church is not the end in itself!

When the question was asked to eight loving, vibrant pastors attending a retreat, “What difference does it make in your own life that you are a Christian?” there was ...silence. Loud silence.

Annie Dillard wrote, “Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are (filled) with children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies’ straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews.”

She says that because we are in such danger of tragic consequences if we continue to ignore His commands!

I’m crazy enough to think God can teach us to live with greater quality in our relationships with family, friends, and strangers if I follow His counsel! I’m simple enough to believe that my heavenly Father intends to teach me something today that I can apply to how I make decisions tomorrow. I’m expecting to discover that my life is a little out of balance with God’s purpose for me – and that I’ll need His encouragement and guidance to get back on track.

I believe the Spirit of God whispers or nudges us in the right direction – because His Word and the preaching I’ve heard have revealed this awesome God to do that very thing time after time after time.

You’ve heard Him, too! And you’ll expect to hear Him again – as long as you’re willing to obey.

What’s interesting is that we find two different ways people answer the big question: What difference does it make in your own life that you’re a Christian? Can you guess what the

two might be?

Sadly, those who grew up in the Church answer the question quite differently from those who come to Jesus later in life. Those who weren't raised in the Church have a very clear sense of having made a *choice* to become a Christian that went against the culture in which they had always lived! I have a good idea of what it's like to be a Christian – and what it's like *not* to be a Christian! There are some in the Church who grew up here – and they didn't have to change cultures to get to God. In other words, those who were “saved” from the world appreciate more deeply the grace, mercy and love of God it took to move them from death to life! They know they are set free and born again!

So why does Christ matter! Let's answer that, first, with the most obvious blessing and truth! Jesus Christ saves you from the misery and eternal suffering from the tortures of hell! There's a place for sinners who refuse and reject the love of God! And there's nothing lovely about it. Hell has no back door. It doesn't burn you up and you just quit existing like a log on the fire. No: like heaven, hell is eternal, too!

We didn't make this up. We are the prophet and the messenger who warns the world to come to Jesus! We know it to be so – because we *know* there has been something foul or corrupt in us that is so disgusting – we would hide it from our family, our friends, and from God, if we could. I'm talking about your anger, jealousy, selfishness, bitterness, lust, greed, a perverse mind that embarrasses you. More simply, I'm talking about sin. We have grieved over our own dark secrets.

But we are blessed! God saves you from sin through Jesus Christ. Listen to this: **God has rescued us from the power of darkness and has brought us into the kingdom of His Son, whom He loves. His Son paid the price to free us, which means that our sins are forgiven... Christ has brought you back to God by dying in His physical body. He did this so that you could come into God's presence without sin, fault, or blame.** (Colossians 1:13-14, 22)

Isn't that last part beautiful? When you choose to follow Jesus, you are welcomed into the presence of the holy God without sin, fault or blame!

What difference does it make in your own life that you are a Christian? 1) You are saved from hell!

2) Secondly, Jesus Christ saves my soul for new life, eternal life, that has already started! In fact, the Bible says we can have the assurance of this salvation!

So why is it important that we share our faith? Because people are going to hell. Some of them are people you know! And it's terrible! Are you satisfied to let them burn?

Our friends may not know there's another side to living! As Christians, we have a relationship with the Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit! And it's wonderful! The “Family of God,” if you will, brings us into the love They share together!

3) Thirdly, with Christ in my life, I find God's mercy, forgiveness, acceptance, and love over and over and over. And we are all in need of this constant flowing river of grace!

The more I experience God's love and counsel, the more aware I am of my own faults and flaws. The more I want to honor God the more aware I am that there are other things in my heart and mind that frustrate my desire. I intend to do right – but there are times when I don't. I need the patience of our loving Father. Don't you?

4) Fourth: God made us for so much more than what we settle for. And God is not through creating. He continues to create new possibilities and new life for us, giving us another chance – because He loves you! God has a plan for you! He wants to walk with you and show you the lives of others He will bless through you!

5) Fifth: Living in this world of deception, insecurities, and uncertainty – alone – is not how God intends for you to live! We can live with such a sense of worthlessness, feeling so insignificant, but that’s such a lie. You are significant and you are worthy! In fact, you are the pinnacle of God’s greatest triumph, the ambition of His greatest sacrifice. On the final day of creation God made man in *His* likeness, and when that image was broken, He suffered His own life on a cross to save you and restore you!

I could go on to answer “What difference does it make that Christ is in my life?” but time won’t permit us to do so right now.

As you commune with God, you will find that the power of His grace will change you from the inside – and you’ll know that you’re different. The key, the Bible says, is to focus your life on the things of God: **Since you were brought back to life with Christ, focus on the things that are above – where Christ holds the highest position. Keep your mind on things above, not on worldly things. You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.** (Colossians 3:1-3)

I believe God wants us to articulate an answer – for the world – to the question, “What difference Jesus makes...?” I believe God wants us to do anything we can to help another person move closer to a relationship with God or into Christian community. I believe He wants us to share our faith, hope and love! Evangelism is of ultimate importance if eternity in Heaven or Hell is the consequence of our choice!

I have to tell you that the small groups, meeting with Christian believers is one of the best ways we’ve found to get you *ready* to share your faith! In the small group you’re changing your routine, your reading habits, your praying habits, and meeting around discussion that focuses “your mind on things above,” thinking new thoughts, allowing God access to your spirit and mind. We need to move first to this place of transformational thinking – where we expand our minds and hear new possibilities on solving conflict. We’ve all been in the world too long. We need the influence of God’s best wisdom, power, and love!

The transformation of your own life is at stake. If we neglect the role and the work to which the Lord calls us – that’s when we feel lost, wondering if God has left us! But God loves you and will never forsake you! You and I have a tendency to wander off. *Come back!* Your Church wants to help. One of the ways we’ve found is meeting in small discussion or study groups, Sunday School, or mid-week gatherings at the Church or in our homes. We want to find a place for you...! I hope you’ll consider our invitation!