

Pentecost Sunday – May 31, 2009 Acts 2:1-21

I love Pentecost – It is truly the birthday of the Christian Church; the day that the Holy Spirit indwelt those early believers and empowered them for the work of the gospel.

This morning's message is going to focus on the Holy Spirit as a force and presence in the life of a Christian and the difference it makes not only in that Christian's life but the whole world.

How many of you here remember a few months ago the reading of Ezekiel 37 and the Holy Spirit leading the prophet to the Valley of Dry Bones? (read Ezekiel 37:1-6) The question was "Son of Man, can these bones live?" How many of you *just know* there's a difference between being truly alive and just existing? Some of us know people who *just exist* don't we. Sure, we do. They've either never had much going on and kinda jiffed through life or something has squashed their hopes and dreams, leaving them listless and lethargic – without much hope of anything changing. The Eternal Father asks, "Son of Man, can these bones live?"

While the story of Ezekiel 37 was written specifically so that the prophet might see that he had a calling – to prophecy to the people of Israel, I believe that the conversation is relevant to the church today. People everywhere are looking for answers to their most basic questions about life, God, "How am I going to support my family?", "Is there any hope left in this crazy world?", etc.

For me, I think we are living at the most exciting time in human history. The Hubble Space Telescope has been refitted with new equipment, some worn

out stuff has been replaced and for another decade or so, enabling that bazillion dollar instrument to continue peering into the heavens. While they say and I think earnestly believe they are looking for the origins of the Solar System – I really believe they are looking for God and they just can't let *themselves* believe it or even breathe the name of God, lest science somehow is devalued and their credibility dashed.

Now, that doesn't mean it isn't a scary time. The world is once and again involved in a colossal game of chess for which no one knows for sure what the rules are. Millions of lives are at stake. We think we have it tough with jobless rates, but let somebody get shaky on the switch and nuclear war, thought to be a relic of the cold war can kill or contaminate millions. We won't be able to hide under our school desks from the apocalypse that awaits us.

How many of you like or *once* really liked roller coasters? It is only a great coaster if you're so scared you are about to wet yourself, right, I mean really? Otherwise, why would you go on it? You don't ride a roller coaster for the scenery but rather how fast it will go, how many times you have to swallow your hotdogs, cotton candy and soda back down and how many times you feel like you are defying several of the laws of nature. I think we're in a period such as this; exciting and scary all tied up together. It is a matter of trust and left to ourselves, we do not have that trust built into our beings.

In such a time as this we are called to be church in the world. We are afraid and exhilarated all at once. Fear paralyzes, it stifles our creativity, our desire to *really* be church today. We want the church to live and prosper, but I've got to say that for an awful lot of folks who sit in the pews every Sunday in an awful lot

of churches want the church to live and prosper for all the wrong reasons. We want the church to be our place of comfort and shelter. We want it to be like it was in days gone by but many are stuck in our Christian Journey at 5 years old. We may recall a few little Sunday School ditties but in reality we don't have a clue what the Bible says. We don't know where the books of the Bible are located in the collection of 66. We are afraid to commit to the Word of God because the Heavenly Father just might call us to DO the work of the gospel; to reach out and bring the rich, the poor, the oppressed or those maimed by society into the fold.

Did you bring *your* Bible to church today? Do you even know where your Bible is this morning? When I ask you to follow along do you reach for your Bible or the Pew Bible or do you just sit and listen and let me or the liturgist do all the work? When was the last time you sought the wisdom of God in its pages? Or have you let someone talk you into believing that the Bible isn't relative, that its pages are full of outdated rules and fabricated stories? Have you let someone talk you into believing that God didn't really mean what is said here in these pages?

I am eternally serious about this. We can't get past the fear of the day, to find ourselves in the place of excitement and wonder unless we get acquainted with God and we can't get acquainted with God unless we get real in our desire to do so. I can give you everything there is but unless the people who sit in the pews decide that building up the Kingdom of God is important enough, that obedience to God is important enough to at least try to know him, there is no point and this church is bound for eventual closure and to become just another stop on the Historical Society's Walking Tour of Historical Sites.

As I shared with you a few weeks ago now, The United Methodist Church has embarked on a new phase of a media campaign called “Re-Think Church”. It is about taking a look at the world around us and being creative enough, courageous enough to reach beyond our comfort zones and let the adrenalin pump so that the lost, the disenfranchised and dissatisfied might come to know the love of God that provided a way for mere humanity to freely be in his presence for eternity – that way being through Jesus Christ and the Cross. People need and really want to know that God is Alive; that God is interested in them, not as a tyrannical judge, but as their loving Savior and Redeemer.

When God asked Ezekiel if the bones, the dry bones, could live, the prophet said, “O Sovereign Lord, you alone know.” It was evident to the world that Israel was all done. It had lost its place in the world, its ability to influence the world in any way. There are certainly people who would say today that the Church (Christianity) has lost its influence and sadly, many statistics would seem to bear that out. “Newsweek” magazine even put on its front cover “The Decline and Fall of Christianity in America”. In March, Dean handed me an article from MSNBS.com that had the Associated Press article entitled, “More Americans say they have no religion”. What is going on?

What did we say when we heard the news all over the media? “Oh, that’s not true”? “Oh, there goes the Liberal Media again”? “Oh, is that for real?” or “Oh God in heaven, what can we do to stop the slide?”

What the church seems real good at these days is being reactive in nature – letting the world take its most power shots at us and then we “react” with all sorts of rhetoric or media blitzes, etc. Meanwhile the church continues its steep

decline. Sadly, the United Methodist Church fits well in those statistics. We continue to decline in numbers and in influence in America – not the globe, but in America because we are stuck in the Valley of Dry Bones and most of us do not even know that we need the fresh winds of the Holy Spirit to blow across and breathe life back into our dried-out, brittle Christian-esque beings.

How do we get the fresh winds to blow across our dry bones and revive us; the church? Anyone? What were they doing in the upper room waiting for the Holy Spirit to show up? In Acts 1 we find Jesus telling the disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit but did they just sit around and wait?

Those people were anticipating the Holy Spirit's arrival. They were not only praying, but praying – believing that the Holy Spirit would come upon them as a fulfillment of the Lord's promise. Living in anticipation of the empowering of the Holy Spirit causes one to be alert for the signs. While God desired for the Holy Spirit to be poured out on that group of believers, it was their practicing of the Presence of God that had prepared them to receive it.

So, first we must be praying the Holy Spirit might be made manifest in our lives and the church. It won't force itself upon us. And without that Pentecostal power the church is just going to die a slow and painful death.

What difference does the Holy Spirit make in the lives of Christians – everything. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would come and be a Counselor – that the Holy Spirit would be the essence of God that would teach us about God and remind us of everything that Jesus shared. The Holy Spirit binds the church together in relationship with Christ and with each other. The Holy Spirit discomferts us and presses us towards obedience and faithful sharing of the

Gospel Truth; that God has provided a path to reconciliation with him through Christ alone. The Holy Spirit prepares our hearts to be open to discipleship, ministry and evangelism.

The Holy Spirit not only leads us to Christ but enables us to grow in grace and truth. We can deny that fact and go our own way but it is to our peril that we do so.

While Pentecostal Power enabled the disciples to start speaking in languages they had never learned, to heal the sick and to drive out demons, it does not necessarily mean that we are going to be able to do signs and wonders that draw the world to us. What it does mean, is that if we seek after that power, we will be outfitted for whatever individual and corporate ministry that God calls us to. 3000 souls came to Christ on that first Pentecost and millions more have said yes to him over the centuries. God is desiring that we all might come to him and be saved. God is desiring that we all might allow the fresh winds of His Holy Spirit to blow across the dried out, brittle bones of faith that we might live again to his glory.

Can these bones live? God wants us to live but *we* must choose life. We must choose to be open to the Holy Spirit's restorative power. Are we, you and I willing to commit ourselves to be open. Are you ready to live? Are you ready for some Pentecostal Power? Are you ready for the fresh winds of the Holy Spirit to come and empower you? (Read Ezekiel 37:9-17)