

## EZEKIEL AND THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

Sermon for Pentecost 2018

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the First Reading from before, Ezekiel 37:1-14: **The hand of the LORD came on me. He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD, and put me down in the middle of a valley. It was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> He kept leading me past them and all around them. I saw very many of them on the surface of the valley, and saw that they were very dry. <sup>3</sup> Then He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones return to life?”**

**I answered, “Lord GOD, You Yourself know.”**

**<sup>4</sup> Then He told me: “Prophesy over these bones, and tell them, ‘Dry bones, listen to the Word of the LORD! <sup>5</sup> This is what the Lord GOD has said to these bones: “Look! I shall cause breath to enter into you, and you will live.**

**<sup>6</sup> I shall put tendons on you, make flesh come on you, and cover you with skin. I shall put breath in you, and you will return to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.”””**

**<sup>7</sup> So I kept prophesying as I had been commanded. While I was prophesying, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling sound, and the bones came closer together, one bone attaching itself to another. <sup>8</sup> While I kept looking, I saw that there were tendons on them, flesh grew on them, and skin covered them over. However, there was no breath in them.**

**<sup>9</sup> Then He told me: “Prophesy to the breath! Prophesy, son of man, and tell the breath, ‘This is what the Lord GOD has said: “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain people, so that they may return to life.”””**

**<sup>10</sup> So I kept prophesying, as He had commanded me, and breath entered them. They returned to life, and stood up on their feet, an exceedingly large army.**

**<sup>11</sup> Then He told me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole family of Israel. Look! They are saying, ‘Our bones are dry, and our hope is being lost. We have been completely cut off.’ <sup>12</sup> Therefore prophesy and tell them, ‘This is what the Lord GOD has said: “Look, My people! I shall open your graves, and bring you up out of your graves. I shall bring you to the land of Israel.**

**<sup>13</sup> Then, My people, you will know that I am the LORD when I open your**

**graves and bring you up out of your graves. <sup>14</sup> I shall put My Spirit in you, you will live, and I shall settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I am the LORD. I have spoken, and I shall carry it out,” declares the LORD.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

According to the traditions of the church year, today is the third great feast that we celebrate. Each of these great feasts is associated with a gift that a member of the Trinity gives. On Christmas, the Father sends the Son into the world and so we celebrate the Father's gift of the Son. On Easter, the Son gives us the gift of forgiveness as He surrenders His life on the cross and then three days later rises from the dead. Now, today, on Pentecost, we celebrate the gift of faith that the Holy Spirit works in us. Although each member of the Trinity is absolutely equal in honour, majesty, and so forth, each also assumes a different role in their work of salvation on our behalf.

Of the three members of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit seems to be the most *mysterious*. Perhaps that is because His role in the work of salvation is to point us to Jesus Christ and give us faith in Him. Every time we focus on the Holy Spirit, He tells us to look at Jesus Christ our Saviour crucified on the cross who won salvation for us. Even as we study the Holy Spirit, we can't help but end up back at the cross. In a way, the Holy Spirit is sort of the stealth member of the Trinity.

Of course, there are times that the Holy Spirit is not so stealthy. That first Pentecost after Jesus rose from the dead, the Holy Spirit made sure that everyone in Jerusalem knew that something was going on. We heard before in our Second Reading, *When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>Suddenly a sound like a violent blast of wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>They saw tongues that separated, like flames, and one rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak,* (Acts 2:1-4).

The objective of this hubbub was to attract the God-fearing Pentecost pilgrims to the site of all the noise. The Holy Spirit had to change the nature of the faith of faithful people. Why? Because up until this time, the church had been looking *forward* to the Messiah. Their faith was in the One *who was to come*. God had

promised Adam and Eve that the Seed would come and crush the serpent's head.<sup>1</sup> Ever since then, the church had been waiting for the promised Messiah. Now the waiting was over. The promise had been fulfilled. The anointed one, the Christ, the Messiah, had kept all the promises and had won salvation for all people. He had defeated sin, death, and the power of the devil with His suffering and death on the cross. He had risen from the dead. He had ascended into heaven. Now, the Word had to get out.

The plan for spreading the Word had been in place for millennia. When God gave the ceremonial law to Moses, He established special feast days. Two of those feast days were Passover and Pentecost. Every God-fearing Jew was to make every effort to be at the religious centre of their faith on the major feast days. At first, this would be the tabernacle – later on, the temple. In this way, God assured that Jerusalem would be full of pilgrims on these feast days. Thus it was that Jerusalem was full of Passover pilgrims when Jesus died for us, and it was full of Pentecost pilgrims when the Holy Spirit proclaimed that this same Jesus was the Son of God and Saviour of the world. Thousands of pilgrims from all over the world were there to witness and hear. Thousands of missionaries were ready to go back home and share the Good News that the long-awaited Messiah had come, and He is Jesus of Nazareth.

Yet the sad thing about Pentecost is that even among all these signs, there were people who rejected the Good News. There were some in the crowd who sneered, "*They are full of new wine,*" (Acts 2:13). This remark shows how ridiculous people can get when they try to rationalise their resistance to the Gospel. Who ever heard of a group of people suddenly becoming fluent in a variety of foreign languages by getting drunk early in the morning?

The greater danger for us living in the twenty-first century is not that we will reject the Good News outright, but that the devil, the world, and even our own sinful nature will divert us away from the Good News. It is very easy to get all excited over the means that the Holy Spirit used on that Pentecost and forget about the ultimate goal of that day. The important point in this Pentecost narrative is that the Holy Spirit drew people together to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins. The *sound like a violent blast of wind, the tongues that separated, like flames,* and the *other languages* they were able to speak, were only means to that end. All too often, however, we get excited by the means that the Holy Spirit used instead of the ultimate goal of those means. We

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:15

become infatuated by the excitement of the supernatural. We get distracted by the noise and the flames. We get excited about speaking other languages fluently. We sometimes forget that all these signs are there to proclaim, “Christ crucified,” the main message of the entire Bible.

The Holy Spirit could probably introduce us to Christ in an infinite number of ways, but He has chosen to introduce us through the Word of God. He works and sustains faith in us through the Word of God that we hear with our ears and read with our eyes. He works faith in us with Holy Baptism as we combine the Word of God with water according to Christ’s command. He sustains our baptismal faith as we confess our sins to God our Father and hear Christ’s Word of forgiveness on the lips of our pastor. He strengthens our faith as Christ Himself comes to us as the living Word in His body and blood. In these ways, the Holy Spirit has chosen to connect us to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Now we might well ask, “How powerful can words really be? Are words really that important?” The answer to that question comes to us from today’s Old Testament Reading.

God actually commanded Ezekiel to preach a sermon to a congregation of dry bones. **The hand of the LORD came on me. He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD, and put me down in the middle of a valley. It was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> He kept leading me past them and all around them. I saw very many of them on the surface of the valley, and saw that they were very dry. <sup>3</sup> Then He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones return to life?” I answered, “Lord GOD, You Yourself know.” <sup>4</sup> Then He told me: “Prophesy over these bones, and tell them, ‘Dry bones, listen to the Word of the LORD! Ezekiel did as God commanded and while he was prophesying, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling sound, and the bones came closer together, one bone attaching itself to another. <sup>8</sup> While I kept looking, I saw that there were tendons on them, flesh grew on them, and skin covered them over. However, there was no breath in them.**

God then told Ezekiel, **“Prophesy to the breath! Prophesy, son of man, and tell the breath, ‘This is what the Lord GOD has said: “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain people, so that they may return to life.””**

<sup>10</sup> **So I kept prophesying, as He had commanded me, and breath entered them. They returned to life, and stood up on their feet, an exceedingly large army.**

The Word of God is powerful – not because we say it or use it – but because God stands behind it with His promises. God has promised: *“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it,”* (Isaiah 55:10-11).

God told Ezekiel that these bones were **the whole family of Israel**. Today, we are the **family of Israel**, the Holy Christian Church: we are the bones. The Holy Spirit took us when we were dead in our trespasses and sins and added tendons and flesh and skin, and continuously breathes the breath of life into us. The Holy Spirit, by the power of His Word, has made us alive in Christ Jesus our Lord. That is the power of God’s Word – to take dead, dry, sinful bones and make them alive in Christ.

Ultimately, that is what Pentecost is about. The fire, the wind, and the languages were all there so that the God-fearing pilgrims in Jerusalem could say, *“We hear them declaring in our languages the wonderful works of God,”* (Acts 2:11). That is what the Holy Spirit still does through the Church – He proclaims the Good News that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, has redeemed us from sin, death, and the power of the devil with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death that we may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He has risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

## PRAYER FOR PENTECOST

Loving heavenly Father, we thank and praise You for pouring out Your Holy Spirit on Your Church as its source of life and strength for ever, and for bringing us to faith in Jesus Christ through Him. By His daily presence and power in our lives, continue to keep us in the true faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ, to equip us for the Master’s service, and to make us ready for every good work. To this end, help us to love and use the Holy Scriptures, so that the Spirit can make us increasingly wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Help us to love our Saviour with our whole being, and to live in cheerful obedience to His

commandments. Enable us to reject the ruler of this world, and to follow with pure hearts the things that produce righteousness, faith, love, and peace.

Let the wisdom and renewing power of the Comforter fill Your Church, so that it may be strong in faith, and active in proclaiming in every language the great deeds that You have done for us. As the Spirit touched the apostles with tongues as of fire, fill all Your people with the fire of faith and conviction, love and worship, witness and service.

Make Your Spirit's influence felt in all our homes. Grant that He may lead all children to live in love and obedience, and give to all parents the spirit of understanding, truth, and love, so that all families may live in godliness and peace.

Rule over the nations of the earth, and help them to acknowledge Your sovereign power and final authority, so that all people may turn from their evil ways and live. Strengthen all who are our leaders to be firm in what is right, unyielding in what is good and just, and eager in what is eternally true and valuable, so that Your name may be hallowed in every sphere of life.

Give the peace of Christ to all who face troubles and trials. May Your Spirit help them in their weakness, show them how to pray as they ought, and give them all the resources of Your love and strength.

All these things we pray in the name of Jesus our Saviour, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## PENTECOST

Ezekiel 37:1-14

<sup>1</sup> The hand of the LORD came on me. He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and put me down in the middle of the valley. It was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> He kept leading me past them and all around them. I saw very many of them on the surface of the valley and saw that they were very dry. <sup>3</sup> Then He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones return to life?" I answered, "Lord GOD, You Yourself know."

<sup>4</sup> Then He told me: "Prophecy over these bones and tell them, 'Dry bones, listen to the Word of the LORD!' <sup>5</sup> This

is what the Lord GOD has said to these bones: "Look! I shall cause breath to enter you, and you will live. <sup>6</sup> I shall put tendons on you, make flesh come on you and cover you with skin. I shall put breath in you, and you will return to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"

<sup>7</sup> So, I kept prophesying as I had been com-manded. While I was prophesying, there was a noise and suddenly a rattling sound, and the bones came closer together, one bone attaching itself to another. <sup>8</sup> While I kept looking, I saw that there were tendons on them, flesh grew on them,

and skin covered them over. However, there was no breath in them.

<sup>9</sup> Then He told me: “Prophesy to the breath! Prophesy, son of man, and tell the breath, ‘This is what the Lord GOD has said: “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain people, that they may return to life.””

<sup>10</sup> So, I kept prophesying, as He had commanded me, and breath entered them. They returned to life and stood up on their feet, an exceedingly large army.

<sup>11</sup> Then He told me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole family of Israel. Look! They are saying, ‘Our bones are dry, and our hope is being lost. We have been completely cut off.’ <sup>12</sup> Therefore, prophesy and tell them, ‘This is what the Lord GOD has said: “Look, My people! I shall open your graves and bring you up out of your graves. I shall bring you to the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup> Then, My people, you will know that I am the LORD when I open your graves and bring you up out of your graves. <sup>14</sup> I shall put My Spirit in you; you will live, and I shall settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I am the LORD. I have spoken, and I shall carry it out,” declares the LORD.”

Acts 2:1-21

<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> Suddenly a sound like a violent blast of wind came from heaven and filled the whole house

where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> They saw tongues that separated, like flames, and one rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup> They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak.

<sup>5</sup> Jews who feared God from every nation under heaven were staying in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> When that sound occurred, a crowd gathered and was be-wildered, because each one heard the disciples speaking in his own native language. <sup>7</sup> They were astonished and amazed and asked: “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> Then how is it that everyone of us hears in his own native language, <sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes and Elamites, people living in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and the province of Asia, <sup>10</sup> people living in Phrygia and Pamphilia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, visitors from Rome, Jews as well as proselytes, <sup>11</sup> and people from Crete and Arabia? We hear them declaring in our own languages the wonderful works of God.”

<sup>12</sup> They were all amazed and puzzled. They asked one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup> Others sneered: “They are full of new wine.”

<sup>14</sup> Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: “Men who are Jews and all of you who are living in Jerusalem, understand this and listen closely to

what I say! <sup>15</sup> These men are not drunk, as you suppose. For it is only nine in the morning. <sup>16</sup> Rather, this is what has been spoken through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup> ‘In the last days, God says, “I shall pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams. <sup>18</sup> Indeed, even on My male slaves and female slaves I shall pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. <sup>19</sup> I shall show wonders in the heaven above and miraculous signs on the earth below: blood, fire and a cloud of smoke. <sup>20</sup> The sun will turn dark, and the moon turn to blood before the coming of the great and splendid day of the Lord, <sup>21</sup> and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”’

John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

<sup>26</sup> “When the Advocate comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me. <sup>27</sup> You also must testify, because you have been with Me from the beginning...

<sup>4b</sup> “I did not tell you these things at first, because I was with you. <sup>5</sup> However, now I am going away to Him who has sent Me, and none of you is asking Me, ‘Where are You

going?’ <sup>6</sup> However, because I have told you these things, sorrow has filled your hearts. <sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, it is good for you that I am going away. For, if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you. However, if I go, I shall send Him to you. <sup>8</sup> When He comes, He will convict the world about sin, righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup> about sin, because they do not believe in Me, <sup>10</sup> about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you do not see Me any longer, <sup>11</sup> about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

<sup>12</sup> “I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot endure them now. <sup>13</sup> However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will lead you into the whole truth. For He will not speak on His own authority but will speak whatever He hears and will tell you what is coming. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and will tell it to you. <sup>15</sup> All things that the Father has are Mine. That is why I have said, ‘He takes from what is Mine and will tell it to you.’

<sup>16</sup> “A little while and you do not see Me any longer and, again, a little while and you will see Me.”