

A sermon preached at Zion Episcopal Church
Pentecost, Year B
May 20, 2018
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Text: Ezekiel 37:1-14, Acts 2:1-21

It sounds more like a nightmare than a vision from God. The prophet Ezekiel found himself in a valley full of human bones. As far as he could see; So. Many. Dried-up. Bones; witnessing to some long ago catastrophe, a once vibrant people wiped out, their future cut off, their hopes turned to dust. In this vision, God questions Ezekiel, "Can these bones live?" Life? Here? Ezekiel's eyes tell him that there is no future in these remains, but in faith he responds simply, "You know, Lord."

And God gives Ezekiel a task, to prophesy to the bones. That is Ezekiel's profession after all, to listen to what God is saying and to share God's words with others, so he speaks to the bones what God has declared, that their bones will be covered with flesh once again and that God will put new breath into them so that they might live. God's own spirit will be in them. And they do come back together, bone to bone. They are fleshed out and given fresh breath and new life.

Ezekiel shared this vision with the people of God in exile in Babylon. They had been forced from their homes and brought to a place where their language, their faith, and their culture were not respected. They were cut off from the people and values that brought meaning to their lives. They were disconnected from both their past and a future trajectory that were full of life and promise. The people's sadness over their present circumstances was deep in their bones.

Into this valley of despair, Ezekiel shared his vision and told them that they were not forgotten. He assured them that the power of God was capable of breathing new life into even the most demoralizing circumstances. They would not stay in exile forever, God's spirit would revive their hope and set them free.

The prophet Joel had a similar message for those who could not imagine that the days and years ahead would see a positive change. Unlikely people would become agents of God's message: old men would dream, young men would be given visions, even women and slaves would foresee the future as God intended and speak of it with power.

Our current circumstances can feel like a spiritual exile. Authoritarian rule and ethnic nationalism are gaining strength in nation after nation. Lying is common place. Greed and the abuse of power have led to a disparity between rich and poor. We are witnessing daily assaults to the values which Jesus taught and which we hold dear.

Our presiding bishop Michael Curry has declared that we are witnessing nothing less than a moral crisis in our country. He calls on us to remember our belief that each human being is made in the image and likeness of God and to reject the white nationalism, racism and misogyny that has invaded our country, including the highest levels of political leadership.

This moral crisis can feel like the dreams and visions at the foundations of our society have been scattered and as dried up as a valley full of bones. I know many good people whose outrage and sadness and feelings of helplessness have brought them to the brink of despair. They wonder if hope is possible in the face of scandal

after scandal, shooting after shooting, and the continuous assaults on decency and humanity that have emboldened others to do despicable things.

On this day of Pentecost, we welcome the message of faith in the renewing breath of God's Spirit. We remember how Peter told the witnesses to the strange sights and sounds of Pentecost that they were seeing the fulfillment of the prophets. God had promised to pour out God's spirit on all flesh and this has come to pass. They were not drunk, they are alive with God.

Pentecost is of course, not just about an event that happened in the past. It is not just about how uneducated fisherman from Galilee found the courage to speak up about the truth about God. It is not about what was made possible then. It is about what is possible now. Jesus told his disciples that when the spirit of truth came, we would be guided us in all things.

God's Spirit is among us, ready to refresh us, to strengthen us and to inspire us to remain faithful to the vision of God's beloved community. As it was with those dry bones that Ezekiel saw, God's breath will pull us back together and help us to stand up with new vigor. Like those first disciples, we too will be given the courage we need to risk looking foolish and to speak the truth in love.

We are part of God's hopes and dreams for the world. And we are meant to be dreamers, each one of us, because God has promised to pour out God's spirit not just on a handful of prophets, but on all flesh. So let us dream with God, and may those dreams spur us to action, fill us with hope, and make us joyful witnesses to God's faithfulness. Let's dream then, of what God has in store for this community and the ways in which God is already calling us forward. Amen.