

## **Pentecost Sunday, 2024, Year B**

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

I'd like you to cast your mind back to our first reading from Ezekiel about the valley of dry bones.

And then imagine that you are there, standing in that valley. Take a moment. There you are in the middle of a valley of very dry bones in the presence of the Sovereign LORD.

Picture yourself. Who are you? What's going on for you?

Are you perhaps the dry bones? Are you weary, dry and worn out, where once you were so vitally pursuing God's agenda, part of his army, his squad? Now with nothing to give.

Or are you standing looking at the dry bones around you, in your community, in its structures, or maybe in your family, in the church? Are you asking God "*Can these bones live?*" And if so, are you expecting him to answer? And even more pertinent perhaps, are you expecting to be part of the answer yourself, as Ezekiel was?

Or are you already hearing God ask you to bring the breath of his Spirit to some dry bones somewhere in order that they may live, whether they are your own or those around you?

Now, park those thoughts for a moment and travel forward with me some 500 years to visit a day where there is the beginning of the fulfilment of the prophecy in Ezekiel 37. To visit a crowded house in Jerusalem 50 days after the Passover when Jesus was crucified.

Why is this indoor space so crowded? Why isn't everyone out celebrating the Pentecost festival, the Feast of Weeks, the Harvest Festival?

Is it because they are still afraid that the Jewish Authorities may come knocking and take them away to imprisonment, or worse? Or is it perhaps that they are feeling jaded and wrung out by the emotional trauma of the last few weeks? First, dashed hopes: Jesus's arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Then the exhilaration of the resurrection and new hope, but without accomplishing, or even instigating, the hoped-for revolution in society.

Are they perhaps feeling like some of us? Let down, disappointed, with the hoped-for – the promised - extension of God's kingdom not really in evidence?

The house is crowded in respect for, and obedience to, Jesus, who told them to wait in Jerusalem. It's crowded because so many of his disciples – not just the eleven – but others and women too are there waiting, in a kind of limbo, maybe with no concept of a way out. Waiting because Jesus told them to during their final encounter with him on the Mount of Olives.

Some – Peter perhaps – are maybe waiting in breathless anticipation, even if they don't fully understand. They are waiting for the Holy Spirit to come upon them as Jesus instructed. They have seen Holy Spirit at work in him; it's exciting.

Others may be waiting in confusion. "Don't we already have Holy Spirit after The Risen Jesus breathed on us and said, 'Receive Holy Spirit'? So, what is all this talk of being baptised in Holy Spirit, of receiving power?"

We cannot criticise them. We are much the same, just ordinary people. People who have celebrated the Resurrection, the Risen Jesus, just as they did. But there is more - there has to be more – and they are waiting for it.

What is our concept of Holy Spirit? To misquote Alastair Campbell, are we those who don't do Holy Spirit?

Jesus, yes, great! Teaching, death on the cross, resurrection. And the Father, yes, a loving heavenly Father. But Holy Spirit? Maybe not so much.

The disciples in the house in Jerusalem probably knew better. They had seen Jesus teaching, quoting Scripture, healing and performing miracles. Some of them had even done it themselves with a temporary grant of power and authority from Jesus for a particular outreach ministry.

Any moment they will know. Holy Spirit comes upon them with the sound of a rushing wind. Or as a literal translation has it, a "violent breath." Remember Ezekiel? *Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'"*

Holy Spirit comes to reverse the decline, to bring life, to revitalise, to reinvigorate, to empower. To bring strength to the weak and to the weary and hope to the hopeless. To make dry bones live.

And even as they heard the sound *They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.*

*All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*

Wow! Just imagine it for a moment. But the important thing here is not the noise or the flames. It is that they were all filled with Holy Spirit. In fact the New Testament expects that all Christians will be. Not just sanctified by Holy Spirit but filled with Holy Spirit.

Not necessarily speaking in tongues. This is desirable but not essential. Paul wrote to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 14:5) *I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy.* Tongues are good but not a sign of the fullness of the Spirit.

Now, take your mind back to the valley of dry bones and the thoughts that you parked there. Ezekiel's vision ends with a vast army standing in the valley, each one filled with the breath of the Spirit. The Sovereign LORD's commentary on this vision is that he is going to put his Spirit of life into those whose bones have dried up so that they will live.

In many ways this isn't really fulfilled until Pentecost when Peter explains what is happening by quoting from Joel; *I will pour out my Spirit on all people.*

And he still does. The Sovereign LORD longs to pour out his Holy Spirit on us, to bring life to our dry bones and regeneration to our communities, to our church. It is not a once in a lifetime episode but, as Paul writes to the Ephesians (5:18 literally) *Be continually filled with the Spirit.* It is to be an ongoing occurrence.

In our gospel reading Jesus says that when Holy Spirit comes he will witness to Jesus – and we must witness too. Dry bones do not witness to new life in Jesus, nor do empty, powerless prayers for the dry bones around us. What does witness is obedience to God's words *"Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!'"* Prophetic words first to ourselves and then to those around us.

Lord Byron was described as "mad, bad and dangerous to know". Holy Spirit is wild, unpredictable and dangerous to know. But may we be bold enough to be (re)filled with Holy Spirit that we may be a witness to the new life in Jesus, perhaps even with power, or prophecy.

Amen

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