

Year B Pentecost John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

Can these dry bones live? Ezekiel wondered this as he looked at a valley filled with dry bones, the remains of many people long dead. Can these bones live? We all have stood, at various points in our lives, looking upon a valley of bones...when life has lost its lustre and seems heavy and stressful. It could be from loss of some sort – the loss of a loved one through death or a broken relationship, the loss of a job, the loss of our health. It may be that our children or grandchildren are taking some seriously wrong turns in life and it is frustrating and deeply troubling. Perhaps changes and newness and loneliness are overwhelming. Whatever the cause, we have all been there, standing in the middle of a valley of dry bones and wondering, “Can these bones live?”

The disciples find themselves there in this gospel reading – standing in a valley of bones. Not only is Jesus telling them he must leave them, there is a bit of the conversation left out of the reading. Jesus tells them they are going to be thrown out of the synagogue, persecuted, many of them will be killed, and – shockingly – these things will be done mistakenly in the name of God. It is no wonder that their hearts are filled with sorrow. They are probably filled with fear too.

And so, the disciples stand looking at the valley of the dry bones and, in distress, they ask, “Can these bones live?” How will we get through the troubling times about to befall us? Even more to the point, how will we get through the troubling times without Jesus? Jesus’ answer to his disciples and to us is that we don’t need to find out what life would be like without him.

In amazement, Ezekiel watches as the bones comes together – bone to bone, sinew to sinew – and are covered in flesh...and, yet, they do not live. Those

people, like us, require the breath of God. As the Spirit of God fills those lifeless bodies with the breath of God, Ezekiel looks on in awe. That vast multitude of formerly lifeless, dry bones, is now on their feet – now a vast multitude of living, breathing people. And then God explains to Ezekiel that those lifeless bones were not people long dead – they were people living without hope.

The disciples stand before Jesus today feeling their hope slip away. Their hope of a better life for Israel, their hope that Jesus was the Messiah is quickly fading as they hear those horrible words. “I’m leaving you,” Jesus says. “I will be killed,” he tells them. The distressing litany continues, “You will be persecuted because of me. Some of you will die.” Their hope is wafting away like smoke on a breeze.

And then Jesus tells them something very confusing. “You’ll be better off when I’m gone,” he says. Really? The disciples aren’t buying that for a moment. But Jesus goes on to explain. As we listen to those words of explanation, Jesus telling his disciples why it is to their advantage that he leave them, those words are just as much for us as for them. Those words tell us why it is to our advantage that Jesus has died, has been resurrected from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of God. Those words tell us, we don’t need to live without hope. We don’t need to despair when we are faced with the valley of dry bones. We do not need to know how we are to live without Jesus. We have the breath of God dwelling with us, giving us life, and giving us the gift of Christ’s presence – always, even unto the end of the age.

We keep encountering Gospel readings in which Jesus is giving us the message that the Spirit of God is dwelling with us, connecting us with God – and I welcome every single one of these opportunities to keep telling you about that amazing

hope-giving, life-giving truth. I will *keep* telling you until that message of joy and hope gets not just into your mind but seeps into your dry bones.

Jesus tells us today that the Spirit “will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears...he will take what is mine,” Jesus says, “and declare it to you.” But Jesus doesn’t stop there. He then says, “All that the Father has is mine.” All that the Father has, belongs to Jesus. All that Jesus has belongs to the Spirit. That’s a round-about way of saying they are one – one God...Father, Son, Spirit. It is what we declare to be true each time we say together, “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God...of one being with the Father...and the Holy Spirit...the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father.” The One God is with us, the presence of the Holy Spirit within us, given first to the apostles at Pentecost, and so on across the centuries until we, too, received the Spirit.

What a precious treasure we have received. But, a treasure is not much good if it is locked away and never used. This treasure is meant to bring us and the world into a closer, eventually perfect, relationship with God and with each other.

Perhaps you noticed how much action is in this Gospel reading – the Spirit will guide us into the truth, will declare what he hears from God, will tell us what is to come, will glorify Jesus through what he declares, will testify to Jesus. And the kicker? We are to testify too. All of these things the Spirit does in this passage are done through us. The Spirit can work perfectly fine on his own but Jesus is telling us in this passage that the Spirit will also be working through us.

We are told that through us the Spirit will prove the world wrong about sin, about righteousness, and about judgement. Wrong about sin...Sin is the turning away from God. But Jesus tells us that those people who think this means only turning

away from a God who never walked the earth as a human like us are getting it wrong. Jesus provides us with the astounding opportunity to be reconciled to God and those who turn their back on this are turning their back on God.

Wrong about righteousness...Jesus was completely righteous yet was nailed to the cross as if he was a sinner, a criminal, a heretic claiming to be God's Son. But he was vindicated, he was proven right, by being raised from the dead. We now participate in that righteousness – we are clothed in Christ's righteousness – through the mystery of baptism. Righteousness is ours through faith in Christ not in outwardly following rules and merely labeling ourselves as Christians. The Pharisees were warned by John the Baptist that their label of "son of Abraham" wasn't good enough. To those people who think they are righteous based only on outward appearances and actions and the cross they wear around their neck Jesus says think again. God looks on the heart. The inside must match the outside.

Wrong about judgment...The world judged Jesus – judged him guilty and hung him on the cross – but the world itself was judged. Raymond E. Brown explains: "In Jesus' death on the cross the trial that endured throughout his ministry seemed to end with the victory of his enemies. But in the [Spirit] Jesus is still present after his death, and so the trial had a surprising outcome. If the hours of passion and death represented the confrontation [the battle between] Jesus and the Prince of this world [as John's Gospel tells us it does] then in being victorious over death, Jesus was victorious over the Prince of this world" (713-14). "Satan has been condemned and has lost his power over the world."¹ It was the world who was found guilty, not Jesus the Christ who is righteous and through whom

¹ These quotations are in the Anchor Bible Commentary on the Gospel of John by Raymond E. Brown.

we receive righteousness. In not believing that Jesus was victorious over the Prince of this world, in not believing he was raised to new life so that we could share in that new life, in *that* the world is judged to be guilty. The world was wrong in its judgement of Jesus.

Jesus was saying these things to his disciples at a time when they were worried and scare; trouble was brewing, the powers of this world were looking very powerful indeed. I'm sure it was difficult for the disciples to believe what Jesus was saying – that he was going to send, to dwell within them, his Spirit – to guide them, lead them, keep them present to him. They probably didn't understand it. As far as they were concerned, life ahead looked like the valley of dry bones as far as the eye could see.

But then it happened. Jesus left. The Spirit came. And Peter...Peter, who, in his fear, had denied being a follower of Jesus, denied even knowing Jesus...Peter, filled with the Spirit, was suddenly boldly proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, and, with his powerful words, he convinced thousands of people to believe, to be baptized in Christ's name. Filled with the breath of God, Peter's dry bones were brought to life by the hope-giving, life-giving message he knew to be true and proclaimed with boldness.

We still live in a world that denies Christ. We live in a world filled with people who say they are Christians but don't follow God's ways, their heart doesn't match their outside. We live in a world that judges their ways to be the way to happiness, judging God's way of selfless love and generosity to be foolishness. But, faced with all of that, we have the gift of God's Spirit – God's life-giving breath. Our dry bones can be brought to life when we acknowledge God's gift,

allow God's gift to work in us and through us. When our dry bones live, we can work together on bringing to life the dry bones of the world around us.

We will renew our baptismal covenant together today. We will pledge to resist evil – to resist the wrongful ways of this world that cause inequality and conflict, encouraging everyone to think, “Me first” regardless of the consequences. We will pledge to align our lives with the way of life in God's kingdom, the way of love shown through compassionate service, abundant generosity, radical welcoming, and forgiveness when we fall short. Every day we are faced with the choice to live according to that pledge to God...or not. Every day we are faced with the question, “Can these bones live?” Let's show the world that our answer is, “Yes!”