Knox Presbyterian Church, Manotick May 19, 2024

Ezerkiel 37: 1-14, Acts 2: 1-21 Pentecost Sunday

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Dent, preacher

**“Trusting the Holy Spirit and Hopeful”**

It has been good to be with you these five weeks. The time has gone fast. I hope that the series I have offered you has given you some hope in the midst of difficult feelings and a natural sense of loss around your previous pastor resigning after eight years of being with you. Processing difficult feelings like sadness, anger, betrayal, and just plain old change is never easy and simple. It feels extra complicated in church, because we hope that we won’t have to go through this in a congregation like this one. But all congregations change and Knox, Manotick is no exception. You know this. I’m just reinforcing what you know.

And so where can we turn in tough times, in challenging times, in times where we may not feel we have hope and a future? You know the answer. Don’t you? Where do we turn?

We turn back to the One who made us, who created us, our planet, our atmosphere, our bodies, and all living things. He knows. He can intercede for us in ways we cannot intercede for one another or for ourselves. I think we know this too, but need to be reminded often. Pentecost is one of those days.

Pentecost gets its name from the number fifty, because it takes place fifty days after Passover. It is called “the Feast of Weeks,” (Deuteronomy 16:9), “the feast of harvest” in Ex. 23:16, and “the day of first fruits” in Num. 28:26. The Jews call it *Shavuot*. They also commemorated Moses receiving the revelation of the Ten Words, the Ten Commandments and the Law at Mt. Sinai. In Exodus 34: 22 it is called “the firstfruits of the wheat harvest” which tells us it is a celebration of God’s provision through a grain harvest of wheat. It also reminds us that the climate is very different in Israel compared to Canada, because the harvest of wheat is in late May or early June. There is more than one harvest in the year and we know their winters are milder than ours. In short, God blesses us with wheat. Doesn’t He? And for those of us with wheat allergies, we know God blesses us with an abundance of many crops. As the sign says on the road here through many farms: If you ate today, thank a farmer. Of course, we are here to say: if you are alive today, thank the Lord. Let us turn to Him anew today.

We celebrate the harvest along with our Jewish friends, even though the times of Passover and Easter no longer correspond exactly. They often fall on the same date, but not always. There is an explanation but suffice to say that Passover and Easter have not been on the same week regularly since the Council of Nicea in 325 AD, when an exact calculation for celebrating Easter according to the lunar calendar was devised.

Why should we be interested in one of the major feasts of Israel in our calendar? Because it was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised clearly in the Gospel of John and that Dr. Luke records in the history book we call Acts. Now we all have the Holy Spirit, all of us who turned from sin and rebellion to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Jesus Christ is the One we come to every Sunday and say, “Lord, take my life, this day and my resources. Let me follow You fully with who I am. I trust You anew with my health, my relationships, my time, my talents and my calling. These are Yours and You have given them to me. I give them back to You.” Again, if that’s a new or renewed prayer in your life, tell someone that you have prayed it and mean it. Your relationship to God is the key to understanding and living well for the rest of your life. It is also the key for this congregation following God and existing well for Him.

**Ezekiel 47: 1-14**

Perhaps we know all these things, then why do we read from the prophet Ezekiel who is transported by the Holy Spirit to a valley containing a field of dead soldiers who had a fought a battle. All you see is the valley except the human remains: the dry bones. God asks the prophet an unusual question. Do you think these bones can live? I’ve been to a lot of cemeteries over the years. Maybe you have too. And even with all the weird movies I have seen, let me tell you I don’t think about all the people in that cemetery living again. And I’ve been in some pretty big cemeteries, in Europe, in Jerusalem.

I think if you’d ask me how many will live again, I’d say all those who have trusted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. God knows and is the final judge.

Ezekiel is a smart guy. He doesn’t answer the Lord about the bones but puts the question back to God, Lord, you created heaven and earth and humans, you alone know. And instead of God simply raising an army by Himself, which He could easily do, He gives the prophet a job. Some might call it “talk therapy.” God calls it, “prophecy.” Prophesy is the verb. Why? What does that word mean? It means “tell them what God tells you.” Scripture says (v. 4 and seven times throughout this passage): “Speak to the bones what God tells you to tell them.” Prophecy is what we do here week by week, where we try to listen to God for what He has to say to you and to me. The pastors and leaders who stand here want you to know God’s life and love in you. They want you to know that God is for you. But you need to know that you are dry bones, if you have not given your life to Christ. You are just the chemicals of your body, if your spirit has not come alive to God’s Holy Spirit. So give yourself anew today to the Lord. Don’t put it off. Give this congregation to the Lord. Don’t put it off. You don’t know what will happen here. But you can trust God for all that is need to be faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ.

Prophecy is Ezekiel’s job. God tells him, “Tell the bones to hear the word of the Lord!” Listen up. You need to be filled with God’s spirit, which is the same word as breath or wind, *ruah* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek. We have pneumatic tools because they work with pressurized air or wind. Ezekiel words are his pneumatic tools as he works with God’s word and speaks it to the bones. The spirit will enter the bones and the life created there will once again give rise to tendons and muscles and flesh and skin. God says, “You will come to life. You will come together. You will come to life.” Isn’t that what we need today desperately?

And perhaps that is a hard thing to see in the church today. We see the bones. We maybe have smelled the death. Our denomination has not made wise choices in the last few years. But we don’t put our hope in our denomination or human organizations. They lead to death. God gives us life through Jesus Christ. He has to put it together. Otherwise we just have a pile of bones, or the next part, where the bones have come together and flesh covers the bones and skin covers the flesh, but they are still dead bodies. They need and we need the Holy Spirit of God coming into us to give us eternal life. The Holy Spirit also brings healing, truth, perspective, and comfort. All these things we need desperately today.

So God says to Ezekiel, Keep preaching. Don’t give up now. Many times I want to give up. Maybe you do too. Prophecy to the breath, the wind, spirit. Say, “Be welcome Holy Spirit. Have your way in me. Have your way in this lost one I love. Have your way in this one that is spiritually dead. I don’t know how to share with them about who You are in my life, but You do. Draw them to Yourself, Holy Spirit. Then they will know: You are the LORD.”

So I did like the Lord told me to do, says Ezekiel, and guess what happened? (v. 9) Not just a bunch of dead bodies in that valley. But the life of God, the wind, the spirit came from God who inhabits every corner of the earth, four winds from north, south, east and west. They took those bodies and breathed life into them, so they stood up and were ready for battle again, an exceedingly great army.

“Lord God, help us see your great army of the Church. Sometimes we think it is lifeless and on the wrong path. Show us the great resources you have across the whole earth, where you have people witnessing to your wonders and love everywhere in every tribe and nation. Show us the Church you see, O LORD. Sometimes we get caught up in the politics and the pretence, the presumption and posturing of so many Christians. Forgive us O Lord, for not seeing what you see: the possibilities, the power and the love of your people poured out across the planet. We hear of at least eighty million believers in the underground church of China alone. House churches in Iran and even a church in North Korea. You see these things and move anew, Holy Spirit in our lives and in our communities, here in Ottawa and beyond.

Now many Jewish people believe this is just a parable because of the next words in Ezekiel 37: 11: Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our **hope** is lost; we are indeed cut off.” (ESV) But then God says He knows how to bring new hope to you. He will bring about resurrection, yes, real resurrection: a whole new life in God’s presence. And we know He has brought resurrection through the clear account of Jesus Christ rising from the dead and raising others to life and promising to raise us back to life, if we but trust Him now, give our lives to Him now, turn from our sins and rebellion against Him now.

Lest you think this valley of dry bones was just a parable, hear anew what Ezekiel records (v. 12):

Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people.

That sure sounds resurrection to me. And how does God do it? Through Pentecost: v. 14 I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.

The Jews knew God had promised them the promised land. We as Christians know clearly God has promised us a new heaven and a new earth, not an earthly kingdom with some new political power as some believe, but a new existence in new resurrection bodies like the one Jesus has right now.

Turning quickly to Acts 2, we hear: This Jesus whom you crucified with your sins through the hands of lawless men… (Acts 2: 22-24) Peter preaches in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, is the very one raised from the grave, loosing the pangs of death, (ESV) because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him (NIV). God keeps His promise to Israel through raising Jesus His Son from the grave and giving His Son the power to raise us through the wind and fire of the Holy Spirit acting in our lives to warm our cold hearts and blow us in His direction.

That valley of bones is much more than a parable, it is a promise to Israel and to all who would hear God from every tongue, tribe and nation on earth. He promises to defeat death in us and the prince of death and evil who looks like he might win, but Jesus wins. And on that day of Pentecost, three thousand were added to their number. What could God do with those pitiful dozen men? He has changed the world with that small group. And when we trust Him for the same thing in Manotick and beyond. We are simply saying, “Have your way, Holy Spirit, in this place. Do what you want to do here anew. I have heard some great stories of what you, O God, have done in this room. Do it again. We want to recount anew in this generation, in this season what you have done for decades and centuries in your Church, O God.

I trust you anew, Holy Spirit. Have Your way in me. Have Your way in us.

Let us pray.