

Sunday Morning Worship

Readings and Prayers 19th May - Pentecost



Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord God, you know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.'

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, 'Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely." Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.'

This is the word of the Lord.

Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

"In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

This is the word of the Lord.

John 15:26-27

'When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

'I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, "Where are you going?" But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to

your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Reflection (by Lindsey)

You'll all be familiar with the phrase that someone is 'like breath of fresh air'.

I wonder when you last said that of someone.

Now here's a question for you:

Do you consider yourself to be a breath of fresh air?

Hold on to those thoughts.....

Our Pentecost selection of readings offer many rich pickings on which to reflect but for the next few moments I'd like us to focus on energy.

For a long time now ecologists have lobbied governments to invest in renewable sources of energy, conscious of the limited supply of the earth's resources. Perhaps our young people are some of the greatest activists for this having taken their inspiration from Greta Thunberg. Experiments have taken place harnessing the energy of the tides, using it to power generators, producing electricity for heat and light. And love them or loathe them, we don't have to travel far to see wind farms making use of each gust of wind to turn their enormous rotor arms. Energy is all around us, energy sustains us, energy changes us – energy is life.

The shortage of the earth's resources has made us more conscious of what saves and sustains life, and the best example of energy indicating life is in the breath of each living person.

From our Old Testament reading today, the "valley of dry bones" is almost certainly the most well-known of the prophet Ezekiel's visions. And although the central point of the text is the renewal of the people of Israel, an important aspect of that message is concerns the 'Spirit of the Lord.' We hear there is no breath in the valley of bones that Ezekiel is standing before. And the story becomes even more powerful when we learn something of its background. In 597 BCE the armies of Babylon captured the city of Jerusalem and deported the king and those who held power. A few years later Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the

Temple and deported a second wave of intellectuals. Ezekiel was deported in the first wave and forced to live in Babylon. People were concerned. Jerusalem, the Temple, the Davidic King had all been destroyed. Was God really faithful? Was God really going to save his people?

But Ezekiel speaks a prophetic message of deliverance: (summarized in verses 12-14) "I *will* put my spirit within you, and you *shall* live, and I *will* place you on your own soil." God's Spirit of breath will reach out and bring people back home. There is a real play on words in Ezekiel. "I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live". God's Spirit will enable the exiles to return; God's Spirit gave Ezekiel the vision; God's Spirit brings life.

The same Hebrew word (*ruach*) is used throughout this passage in several different senses. It's appropriately translated both 'spirit' and 'breath' but unfortunately we miss the deliberate plays on the word with the English translation. These different uses of the word 'ruach' in Ezekiel only touch the surface of the many ways it's used throughout the Old Testament where the spirit is associated with both the created world and with God; it is wind or breath that gives life to both human beings and animals, or it is the 'spirit' of a person in the sense of our emotion or will. It also refers to God's power as a creative force and an inspiring prophecy.

Not all these senses are visible in Ezekiel, but some are. It is the Spirit of Yahweh that makes the vision possible; the breath comes like the four winds and brings life to the dead bones.

The whole point of the vision report is that God can and will - through the Spirit - bring life to the dead bones. Can these bones live? Yes they can - through God's Spirit breath. The repetition of the word Spirit reminds us that God's Spirit is key; without it, things are impossible. With God's Spirit there is life.

I'd like to invite you just for a moment to consider if or where there may be dry valleys in our own lives. Do we have any bones that need new life

breathed into them? What or where are the areas of our own lives that need a breath of fresh air?

You will all be familiar with the adage 'use it or lose it' - and I'm sure there are many here among us, me included, who might identify with that phrase. Allow me to give you an example. Every week I visit the gym for a circuits class; it's a mix of cardio and weight training and every week I lift the same weights for the same exercises. My body knows what to expect - and my bones and muscles cope with it. On one occasion though, our instructor decided to mix things up and the weights that I was so used to lifting felt twice as heavy when applied to a different exercise - identifying muscles I never knew existed. I felt like I'd been through the wringer the following day and it was days before I felt fully restored.

We can apply that same analogy to our spiritual life when we fall into patterns, habits and routines. I should say here that having a regular habit or pattern of prayer (for example) is not a bad thing, but when we only use a particular way of doing something - we close ourselves off to new experiences and can become dried up or dormant.

I wonder which areas of our own spiritual lives feel dried up or dormant. Perhaps your own spiritual life feels pretty good but you sense some dry valleys in the lives of your close family or friends. How might you help them breath new life into those dry areas? Perhaps you might offer a word of encouragement or support.

In our Gospel reading this morning Jesus tells his disciples that he will send the Spirit to guide them into the truth and to speak the truth as witnesses. The Spirit will act as an advocate to help the disciples speak and we all know that spoken words need breath to deliver them. So the Spirit will help us too - not just to speak words about Jesus but to speak words of truth to one another; to encourage one another and build each other up. In doing so the Spirit will help us to further glorify God.

And so returning to the question I asked you to consider a few minutes ago:

This week – how might you be a breath of fresh air?

How does the Spirit bring life to you?

How might you encourage someone else to be a breath of fresh air by speaking words of encouragement and truth to them?

How can we use our breath and our speech to be advocates for others?

Prayers

In the power of the Holy Spirit,
let us pray.

To the bidding: Come, Holy Spirit
Please respond: **Holy Spirit, come!**

Come, Holy Spirit:
Holy Spirit, come!

For a fresh in-breathing of life and power
in each church community,
which breaks down barriers
and sets us on fire with God's love.
Silence

Come, Holy Spirit:
Holy Spirit, come!

For the grace to see this world
and its needs and problems
through the eyes of love, hope,
justice and mercy;
for the grace to abandon prejudice
and build bridges of reconciliation.
Silence

Come, Holy Spirit:
Holy Spirit, come!

For all who feel dried up and cut off,
all who have been exhausted by the pressures
and stresses of caring and working.
For all who feel hopeless and forgotten,

for people trapped in conflict, poverty or oppression;
for our own fears and doubts, and our own sense of loss,
where sometimes we have lost sight of love.
For all who feel that they are living in the valley of dry bones.

Silence

Come, Holy Spirit:
Holy Spirit, come!

For all who face chronic pain or illness,
and all undergoing painful or distressing treatment.
For the restoration of those who are sick
to wholeness and well-being;
from our own community especially we pray for: Meriel Orton,
Claire, Joyce Pringle, Peter Murphy, Ann Hunt, Anuwat Wanggane, Joan
Tyson, Alan Coe, Jack Tubby, Rob & Lucy, Roger Jones, Patricia Ash, Jason
Thomson, Ryan Day, Bryan Plester, Brenda Hulland, David New, and
Adrina and Alan Price.

Silence

Come, Holy Spirit:
Holy Spirit, come!

For all who are grieving,
and all who are disoriented by the death of people they love.
For those who have recently died:
Jean Maltby, Les Walker, Beryl Bremner and Maurice Holloway.
For those whose anniversary of death falls at this time: John Life, Philip
King, Reg & Marjorie Gumery, Naomi Lewis, Hartley Brown, Ann Jarrett,
Phylliss Warren and Edward Clarke.

Grant us with them a share in your eternal kingdom.

Silence

Come, Holy Spirit:

Holy Spirit, come!

For a deeper knowledge and love
of the God who knows and loves us completely.

Merciful Father,

accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son
our Saviour, Jesus Christ.