

Sermon

“The Place of My Resurrection”

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, May 23, 2021

Pentecost

A Prayer for illumination:

We are haunted, Lord, by the knowledge of those who came before and who suffered much. The “prophets & apostles, the saints & martyrs.” We worship this day in the presence of the table of your grace and we know we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who know the cost of discipleship.

We gather, yet again, before your word. Inspire this gathering. Send your wind from North & South, East & West and raise up from our dry bones a community filled by the breath of life.

We ask in the name of the Holy Spirit — loose in the world and loose among us this day. Amen.

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 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. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Acts 2:5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7

Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

Acts 2:14 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. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

- 17 ‘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.
18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.
19 And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
20 The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.
21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’*

Wind

Ezek. 37:1 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. 2 He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the

valley, and they were very dry. 3 He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” 4 Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 5 Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 6 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.”

Ezek. 37:7 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. 8 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. 9 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.” 10 I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Ezek. 37:11 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.’ 12 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. 13 And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 14 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.

- I. The prophet Ezekiel had it hard...**
 - A. Presiding over the great calamity of Exile.**
 - B. First the Assyrians came and over ran us**
 - C. The the Babylonians in 587 destroyed us**
 - 1. Razed our holy city**
 - 2. burned our holy temple**
 - 3. deposed, blinded, and abducted our king...**

- D. It was into this national trauma that Ezekiel’s poetry is offered.**
 - 1. Against our poverty**
 - 2. Our fear**
 - 3. Our memories of violence**
 - 4. Our haunting regrets**
 - E. Against all these tragedies (and more) were the words of a poet — inspired, no doubt, but what could possibly be said in the presence of our great troubles?**
 - F. A vision of dry bones...dry bones which we are told are the whole nation of Israel.**
- II. We had marched past valleys of the fallen on our forced relocation to Babylon.**
- A. We well, remembered the stench of death, and the horror of decay.**
 - 1. And we wondered what would become of these our fallen who did not even have the dignity of a burial in compensation for their sacrifice.**
 - B. So when the prophet told us of a vision it was not hard for us to accept the image of a valley strewn with the dried bones of our nation.**
 - C. A valley filled with bones was no stretch for our imagination — but what came next surely was!**
- III. Prophecy to the bones! “Hear the Word of the Lord! I will put my Spirit in you and you shall live!”**
- A. Bone to bone**
 - B. Sinew after sinew**

C. and then the breath of life!

“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.” 10 I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

D. And then the announcement that we would, one day, return to our homeland again.

- 1. And we did! The un-imaginable happened — Babylon was overrun by the Persians and King Cyrus sent us home!**

IV. Perhaps we find Ezekiel hard to identify with.

A. Few of us have known the kind of exile which was the soil out of which such a startling image came.

B. But we *had* known the dry times which come to every home and every heart sooner or later.

- 1. Seeing loved ones who are lost to us by addiction or estrangement**
- 2. Watching the violence between as well as within nations**
- 3. Struggling to make sense of the persistent legal and economic disparities in our own communities**
- 4. Witnessing the unyielding march of time as those we love become those we remember**
- 5. We have endured the pain and worry of illness — perhaps in the last 2 years more than ever for many of us.**

† Have known the isolation of COVID-19

- † Have watched as thousands die daily
- † Even now we cringe as we hear the details of its ravaging of the people of India

- C. And we have known the dry times of the Spirit too
 - 1. Wondered how to pray
 - 2. Yearned for an opportunity to be together in worship
 - 3. Pondered the persistent questions:
 - † Where is God in all this?
 - † What are we supposed to be learning in the midst of this crucible?
 - † What would Jesus do?

V. Today we conclude the great Easter-cycle of the liturgical calendar.

- A. What began with the ashes of Lent has, by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, now become the flames of Pentecost. (Think “ashes to ashes - dust to dust.”)
- B. What started as penitence has now become zeal.
- C. Over the last seven weeks in the Seasons of Easter: The “Great Fifty Days” to Pentecost.
 - 1. A time of Neptic spirituality (watchfulness). We are living our lives aware that Christ is risen and is loose on the world. Where will we encounter him next? In what stranger will we discover the risen Christ? (Road to Emmaus, and numerous stories in wake of resurrection).

2. **Witness** - How will we join with the millions of Christians who for thousands of years have declared “He is risen!”? In what ways will our discipleship demonstrate that we know him to be loose in the world and likely to be encountered by those with eyes to see and hearts to hold the holy?
3. **Service** - Will we return to our “fishing” or will we dedicate ourselves to feed those who are entrusted to us? See Peter’s encounter with Christ at Tabga (John 21).

D. Pentecost -

1. **Community/Hospitality** - Pentecost is a day that challenges us to see the Body of Christ as a wildly diverse community which is united by the power & presence of the Holy Spirit. How do we embody a sense of confidence that this is, in fact, God’s dream about the community of the church? What if we were to make room for and embrace those people with whom we do not easily feel a sense of neighborliness?

VI. The beginning of the Christian Church was characterized by several things:

- A. **The presence of God in the Holy Spirit**
- B. **The presence of a very diverse group of people.**
 1. **Multi-racial**
 2. **Multi-lingual**
 3. **Multi-national**

VII. God seems to have been specifically timing the arrival of the HS to reach maximum diversity.

- A. This is great blessing for the church . . .**
 - 1. No boundaries**
 - 2. No limits for the reach of God’s love**
 - 3. The Spirit makes it possible for each to hear the Gospel “in their native tongue.”**
 - 4. “Everyone belongs” — a sentiment Peter would find reinforced in his experience at Joppa — “God shows no partiality.”**
 - 5. The church of Pentecost is a church filled with the gifts of every kind of person.**
- B. This is great challenge for the church . . .**
 - 1. One of the great struggles of all humankind is *the struggle to accept others* as they are without wanting to change them.**
 - a. We think there is safety in familiar people so we segregate. We resist being out of our element**
 - b. We confuse pride in our own distinctive gifts with a false sense of superiority over the gifts of others.**
 - c. We quickly forget that God timed the start of the Christian church to maximize its diversity.**

VIII. We move from dry bones to kindled fire by Watching, Witnessing, Serving, Welcoming

- A. Watching for our risen Lord — particularly in the form of the stranger**

- B. Witnessing by living lives of peace, and generosity, and loving kindness to all: at home, at work, in the world.**
- C. By serving — caring enough to care for friends, family, neighbors, and “brothers and sisters who are away.” Using Pentecost to encourage that we let the circle of our love expand more and more.**
- D. By welcoming — being the kind of people who welcome:**

9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs

IX. So may the Wind of God blow through us,

- † may the Spirit renew us —**
- † fill the sails of our hearts and**
- † And restore us by God’s love and make us new.**