

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MAY 19, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

PENTECOST SUNDAY

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

- One: The day of Pentecost has come, and we are together.
Will the works of God be known among us today?
- All: We live in the valley of dry bones.
Around and within us is emptiness.**
- One: God comes to us as a gentle breath or violet wind.
Catch your breath, God's breath, and live.
- All: There are stirrings deep within that give us hope.
There is a Spirit linking us to one another.**
- One: The fires of love dispel life's shadows.
God's Spirit comes to give us new life.
- All: Surely God is in this place!
May the glory of God be known among us today!**

***OPENING HYMN** "Come, O Spirit, Dwell Among Us" GtG 280

- 1. Come, O Spirit, dwell among us;
come with Pentecostal power;
give the church a stronger vision;
help us face each crucial hour.
Built upon a firm foundation,
Jesus Christ, the Cornerstone,
still the church is called to mission
that God's love shall be made known.**
- 2. We would raise our alleluias
for the grace of yester-years;
for tomorrow's unknown pathway,
hear, O Lord, our humble prayers.**

(continued...)

In the church's pilgrim journey
you have led us all the way;
still in presence move before us,
fire by night and cloud by day.

3. Come, O Spirit, dwell among us;
give us words of fire and flame.
Help our feeble lips to praise you,
glorify your holy name.
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Three in One: what mystery!
We would sing our loud hosannas
now and through eternity.

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Almighty God,
you poured your Spirit upon gathered disciples
creating bold tongues, open ears,
and a new community of faith.
We confess that we hold back the force of your Spirit among us.
You call us to act boldly
but our fear keeps us from following your call.
We hesitate and doubt.
We fail to listen for your word of grace,
speak the good news of your love,
or live as a people made one in Christ.
Have mercy on us, O God.
Transform our timid lives by the power of your Spirit,
and fill us with a flaming desire to be your faithful people,
doing your will for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.
in whose name we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: The Lord hears our confession and is eager to forgive.
All: **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”** (Acts 2)
One: Take to heart the good news; believe it, live it.
All: **In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Alleluia! Amen.**

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READINGS Ezekiel 37:1-14

Acts 2:1-4

EZEKIEL 37:1-14 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ *The hand of the Lord came upon me, and 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 The Lord led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³ The Lord said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." ⁴ Then the Lord 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."*

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 the Lord 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 the Lord commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.*

¹¹ *Then the Lord 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.*

ACTS 2:1-4 (New Revised Standard Version)

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.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON ““Can These Bones Live?”” by Pastor Bill Vincent

"Mortal, can these bones live?"

Bones dried out because hope has dried up, from catastrophic failure, terminal illness, untimely death.

Bones scorched by centuries of animosity between peoples or bitterness of political conversation.

Bones burned out by disappointment and dashed dreams, where we try and try again...and get nowhere.

Today we receive the Pentecost Offering: an offering earmarked to help youth, young adults, children at risk.

It made me wonder.

How many children are at risk, in this area alone, who wake up to parents being led away by police for having a meth lab in their basement; who go to sleep at night wondering if tomorrow the abuse will stop; who go to bed hungry because poverty has snatched the means from their family's hands and sucked the bread from their mouths?

How many youth yearn for a place to go and grow, a place to try out their wings with a safety net of love and acceptance...and find nothing but disapproval and disdain?

How many young adults strive to find their way in life, looking for pointers and directions...and find nothing but stop signs, and arrive nowhere but dead ends?

Are our communities at risk, with a lack of vision, dwindling resources, conflict, and a loss of identity?

Bones dry, lifeless, hopeless.

Can these bones live?

No, they cannot.

Now don't be surprised by my answer.

Think of all our plans to make the bones live. "If only we tried harder." "If only you-know-who would admit they are wrong." "If only we could go back to the way things were." "If only we would embrace the newest idea." "If only everyone would do their part."

Can these bones live?

No, they cannot.

Not by our effort.

Not on our watch.
Not with us at the helm.
Not under our control.

But under God's?
That's a whole `nother matter all together.

"Can these bones live?"
"O Lord God, you know." Good answer, Ezekiel.

I can't tell you how many times, in my own life, I have suffered a set back, or things are not coming together, life is falling apart, and in frustration, my hands go up in the air: "I give up." Then this insight clicks in: "OK, God: you lead."

Jesus prayed, *"Into your hands I commit my spirit"* (Luke 23:46)
"Into your hands we commit our dry bones."

Then we might hear something stirring.
Plans come together. Ideas fall into place. Resources connect.
But still...something's missing.

then the Lord God formed [the human] from the dust of the ground, and breathed into [its] nostrils the breath of life; and the [human] became a living being.

And No, these words are not from Ezekiel. They're from Genesis (2:7 NRSV): the story of the creation of people.

This is how Ezekiel says it:

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 [the Lord] 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 [the Lord] commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

"...and they lived."

The people returned from Exile. God blew a breath of fresh air into their lives.

Some 500+ years later, the disciples were excited. They had seen their resurrected Lord. Indeed, he had spent some 40 days with them: speaking to them, teaching them, being with them.

"Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6 NRSV)

they asked.

How disappointed they must have been to hear the answer, *"It is not for you to know."*
In other words, No, not now.

The disappointment. The let down.

“But everything had led to this: he is the Messiah, the Son of God! Surely this is the time. If not now, then...now what?”

Were their bones as dry as Ezekiel's vision? I don't know. But perhaps their expectations had worn thin. The wind had been knocked out of them. Their hopes dried up, as Jesus ascended into heaven out of their sight.

“Now what?!” I picture them shouting. And if we listen, we may hear echoed back yet another question: *"Mortal, can these bones live?"*

And so they were gathered together, perhaps still pondering their question – “Now what?” – when a wind began to blow in their midst. And tongues of fire appeared among them – and on them. And eventually the wind would blow them out into the streets, into the midst of others. And there Peter would confront the rumors that started to spread: “They’re drunk!” But Peter said,

*“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.”*
(Acts 2:16-17a NRSV)

He might just as soon have quoted from Ezekiel.

A spirit of new life and new hope. The Spirit driving them forward. The disciples didn't know what road they had been set on, but they went, in the hope and the life of God's Spirit.

What about us?

We may be confused, with an uncertain future, unsettled hearts, unsure resources. Now what?

Is there hope?

Yes, there is, but we have to know where to look for it.

"Mortal, can these bones live?"

"O Lord God, you know."

Only God knows.

And not only does only God know if these bones can live. Only God knows the strength of the sinew and the mass of the muscle and the shade of the skin that will join them together. Only God knows the shape and the form of these hope-to-live bones. And only God can breathe the breath of life into them.

Not that we throw up our hands and think we can't do anything: “What’s the use?” Not that we absolve ourselves of all responsibility: “Not my job!”

As E.L. Allen reminds us,

we are not...to wait inert for something to turn up. ... we are to be faithful to our present tasks.... (*The Interpreter's Bible, Volume VI, p.270*)

Even if it is to stay in Jerusalem, and wait for the promise.

So after the Ascension, they joined together in prayer. They took care of certain housekeeping details. And they were all together in a community of hope.

It is our job to place ourselves at God's disposal. It is our job to make ourselves available to God's working. It is our job to risk ourselves for God's purpose.

And it is our job to be open to God's directing, whether it be down a worn path we know all too well, or down a path that is frightening in its unfamiliarity.

Paul had it right when he wrote,

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. (I Corinthians 3:6 NRSV)
Therein lies our hope.

We do our work.

We plant ideas.

We water our own souls, cultivate the environment in which we live. We are nurtured at this [--Communion--] table.

And we seek to be faithful to the work we see, the work we know, the work set before us.

But God gives the growth.

And we need to trust in God to give whatever that growth may be, and be open to wherever that growth may lead.

Can we experience hope and new life...as individuals? as a community?

Can we share hope and new life?

"Mortal, can these bones live?"

By God's grace, in God's way, Yes, they can.

***HYMN** "Wind Who Makes All Winds That Blow"

- 1. Wind who makes all winds that blow--
gusts that bend the saplings low,
gales that heave the sea in waves,
stirrings in the mind's deep caves--
aim your breath with steady power
on your church this day, this hour.
Raise, renew the life we've lost,
Spirit God of Pentecost.**
- 2. Fire who fuels all fires that burn--
suns around which planets turn,
beacons marking reefs and shoals,
shining truth to guide our souls--
come to us as once you came:
burst in tongues of sacred flame!
Light and Power, Might and Strength,
fill your church, its breadth and length.**

(continued...)

~ 7 ~

3. **Holy Spirit, Wind and Flame,
move within our mortal frame.
Make our hearts an altar pyre,
kindle them with your own fire.
Breathe and blow upon that blaze
till our lives, our deeds and ways,
speak that tongue which every land
by your grace shall understand.**

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**We trust in God the Holy Spirit,
everywhere the giver and renewer of life.
The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,
sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,
and binds us together with all believers
in the one body of Christ, the Church.
The same Spirit
who inspired the prophets and apostles
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,
engages us through the Word proclaimed,
claims us in the waters of baptism,
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.
In a broken and fearful world
the Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.
In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

(from A Brief Statement of Faith, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Spirit God...
All: ...breathe into us your life.

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection: "I'm Goin' a Sing When the Spirit Says Sing" Joint Choir

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**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

We thank you, O God, that you have blessed us so abundantly out of the resources of this world and with the gift of your Spirit. As you, in Christ, have given to us, so we give to you both our offerings and our very lives, that we might share in spreading the good news of your grace and life and love. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: The Lord be with you.
People: And also with you.
Leader: Lift up your hearts.
People: We lift them to the Lord.
Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

(The prayer continues...)

The Lord's Prayer (Traditional)

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.**

(continued...)

**Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our debts,
 as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
 and the power, and the glory,
 forever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

(Please hold the bread so that we might partake of it together, to remind us of our participation in this sacrament as a community in unity with Christ. Please drink the cup as you are served, reminding us of our individual participation in this sacrament and our personal commitment to our Lord.)

Sing: “Breathe on Me, Breath of God” GtG 286

- 1. Breathe on me, Breath of God;
fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love,
and do what thou wouldst do.**
- 2. Breathe on me, Breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until with thee I will one will,
to do and to endure.**
- 3. Breathe on me, Breath of God,
till I am wholly thine,
until this earthly part of me
glows with thy fire divine.**

Words: Edwin Hatch, 1878

Music: TRENTHAM, Robert Jackson, 1888

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Sing: “Spirit of the Living God” GtG 288

**Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.
Melt me; mold me; fill me; use me.**

(continued...)

**Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.**

Words and Music (LIVING GOD): Daniel Iverson, 1926
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Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Come, O Spirit”

1. **Come, O Spirit, with your sound
like a wind, quick rushing;
come from heaven and stir our hearts,
each disciple touching!
Mold our actions to your will,
you our service giving;
move within our fellowship,
transform now our living!**

2. **Come, O Spirit, with your flame,
leaping tongues of fire;
come, and with your glorious light
all our thoughts inspire!
Rest upon each servant's head
till each one is speaking
of our Christ, the Holy One
all the earth is seeking!**

3. **Come, O Spirit, fill your church,
making strong our mission;
fill your daughters and your sons
with a mighty vision,
till the great and glorious day
when the whole creation
sings your praise as Lord and King,
giver of salvation!**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...
All: ...**Amen.**

***RESPONSE** “Go with Us, Lord” GtG 748

**Go with us, Lord, and guide the way
through this and every coming day,
that in your Spirit strong and true
our lives may be our gift to you.**

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POSTLUDE

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