

25. Pentecost 2015.
Ezekiel 37:1-14. Psalm 104:26-36.37b. Acts 2:1-21. John
15:26&27; 16:4b-15.

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts, be acceptable to you, our Lord, our God, our Strength and our Redeemer.

Do you know what? I preached at Pentecost last year!! So now what do I do? How do I approach the subject of the coming of the Holy Spirit differently?

For a start I have chosen the reading from Ezekiel to give a different slant.

So here's the situation.....

Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army invaded Israel. They had reduced Solomon's Temple to ashes, and had taken many of the Jewish people back to Babylon as captives. This is the condition that Ezekiel is in. The nation of Israel is DEAD. BUT ... God has a plan!

Do you recall that passage in Joel that says:

²⁸ And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:

²⁹ And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.

I have dreams as I guess all of us do – some are so vivid and real it is as tho' it all really happened.

Now here is Ezekiel – a true prophet of God in communication with God in a vivid dream or vision. He says "The hand of the Lord came upon me, and brought me out by the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in a valley."

Now I remember words people said in my dreams, some from way back and are still vivid in my mind, but I'm not sure that God has ever communicated with me in that way. Here tho' we actually have God asking Ezekiel a question. God says "Mortal, can these bones live?"

The rest of the story is so well known, but as the Spirit or breath starts moving over the bones we can take 4 very relevant points from this passage. First of all we have:

1. Motion — the bones moving. Weird or what! Can you imagine it!
2. Organisation — the bones knitted together and covered with flesh. But there was no breath in them. The bodies were there but there was no life in them.

The words that follow are quite powerful in my opinion.

Through Ezekiel God calls the Breath from the four winds of the earth to breathe into those that were slain.

And what follows? – we have:

3. Vitality — the organisation animated. Suddenly the bodies come to life and start sorting themselves into a great army. They are now ready, - but for what?
4. Exertion — to get a great army to move it takes exertion on the part of everybody. It takes organisation and communication, it takes hard work, it takes purpose, and above all the army has to take orders.

So we have the word "M O V E".

That is what the Holy Spirit does – it makes us move.

There are several ideas about the meaning of this vision, but for now we will leave it there.

In our **Gospel** Jesus indicated to the disciples that there were certain things he did not say to them from the beginning. He did not tell them of the hostility of the world. He did not tell them about the tremendous opposition and persecution they would face. Nor did he tell them how to meet it. And he says why:

"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you."

There he indicates our need as human beings to be kept and supported and strengthened. He was looking after these disciples himself. Since he was there, they had no need to know all that he was keeping them from, or how it was done.

"But now," he says, "I'm going away. Now you'll need to understand what has been happening."

There he reveals to us the basic need of our humanity: to be kept. This is what the Scriptures teach us about ourselves -- that we are basically

born to be dependent on something or someone else to keep us. We are not able to handle life by ourselves. No one is.

You've heard the saying "No man is an island" – we all need, and to be needed by somebody.

So Jesus, the great Messiah, healer, teacher and Himself a great comforter, is leaving the disciples, but he promises to send another comforter and advocate – the Holy Spirit who will be to us all that Jesus was to his disciples.

He will speak for us to God – he will speak for God to us. God can use him to kick us into action. He will be in communion with our spirit so that we can know what God wants us to do.

And so much more – he can form us into an army for God.

What the disciples had to do was wait. What were they expecting?

Whatever it was they had to be ready.

Now here is a bit of scriptural fact. The Jews held to all their religious celebrations "religiously"!!!

Pentecost was a memorial to the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai.

Resurrection Morning occurred on the Feast of First Fruits. Pentecost was seven weeks later. That's why it's sometimes called the Feast of Weeks. The actual dates of both were established by counting from the first Sabbath after Passover. First Fruits was the first day after the Sabbath and Pentecost was the 50th day, so there were only 49 days between First Fruits and Pentecost. Some say it was 10 days but there is a thought that it was 9. In the bible numbers are often very often significant.

In Scripture, the number 9 often marks the end, or conclusion of a matter. The arrival of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost marked the end of the Lord's personal ministry on Earth.

So we move on to what is happening in the **Acts** reading. Here we read of what the Holy Spirit can achieve – the power he can release. Oh boy! – I would have loved to have been there.

Here we have the Breath – except that it is not the calm, gentle breath that moved over the waters at Creation, or over the bones in Ezekiel's valley. It had the sound of a mighty wind which filled the entire house where the disciples were. A tongue as of fire rested on each one of them.

What do you think they would have felt? Picture the scene – maybe they were pointing at each other, maybe scared witless or did they feel a sense of purpose and peace within?

Look what God, through the Holy Spirit, achieved on that day. Every person of every nation that were present when the disciples started speaking understood what was being said. Not only was the Holy Spirit speaking through the disciples, he was also translating to individuals. In the words of Luke in Acts "*they were amazed and astonished*". Some thought they were drunk, but now we have Peter – he who denied his Lord – taking centre stage. Boldly he addresses the crowd and includes in his sermon those words from Joel.

This is what the Holy Spirit can do for each of us.

At this point in time these readings are **so, so** relevant to us - as individuals, but also to us as a church of God's people.

We too have had to wait – what will happen for us? What are we expecting? Like the disciples we too need to be ready. Ready to work with our new Vicar to move forward, and as we progress in our search for that person, we need to be open to the Holy Spirit. We need to be prepared to let the Holy Spirit use us.

We know that we need to do something. It is not enough to stay in our comfortable little family much as I, for one, love it.

We can't let St. George's die like that great army of Israel did. We have to allow the Holy Spirit to breathe new life into us and to make those four points that I referred to earlier.

Shall we then take as our "catch word" for the future the word **MOVE**.

M – get moving.

O – get organised

V – allow the Holy Spirit to give us vitality

E – put in some exertion.

The Holy Spirit worked with the early church, - he can work with, and for us now.

Let us, then, move forward praying for a new chapter in St. George's history, for a new living centre of our community, and above all a people that is committed doing our Lord and Saviour's work in this place.

As the Psalmist says:-

"O Lord, how manifold are your works! Bless the Lord O my soul".

And everyone said "**Amen**".