

BRINGING LIFE TO DEAD PLACES**Ezekiel 37:1-14; Acts 2:1-15****(Read Acts 2:1-15)**

Intro: In 1964, my paternal grandmother, Katie Tyson, retired from her job at the Valley Forge Flag Factory in nearby Spring City, PA. (A quick digression here: Grandma helped sew the flag that was on John Kennedy's coffin and flags from that factory were used for the same purpose for Presidents Dwight Eisenhower, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon and others, when they were laid to rest, AND the flag that was famously raised on Iwo Jima was from Valley Forge Flag. But I digress.

Back to Grandma: She was retiring because she was moving to the Messiah Children's Home near Mount Joy, Pennsylvania where, at age 63 she became a house mother and cook for the next 15 years with a little, 2 year, stint in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in the middle of it to do the same thing, be a house mother and cook for BIC missionary kids, until she really retired in the late '70s.

When Grandma moved my little brothers and I missed her terribly because for as long as we could remember in our young lives (I was seven) she had lived right adjacent to our family home in a little house trailer. My dad then sold the trailer to a man who came and pulled it way with an old U.S. Army Jeep. After he pulled the trailer away the man walked back around it to make sure everything was okay. As he did, he looked at the patch of bare dirt that remained there that had not seen sunlight in many years and told us the ground would be dead and no grass would ever grow on it. Well, I was 7 years old, and I believed anything an adult told me. So I believed him. But my dad sowed grass on that spot and it grew beautifully. Daddy brought life to a dead place.

God is in that business. On this Pentecost Sunday, we celebrate that by the Holy Spirit God is in the business of bringing life to dead places.

He's always been in that business – in the community of the Trinity, the Spirit of the Lord has always been active. In fact in the first two verses of the Bible we see it, *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the **SPIRIT OF GOD** was hovering over the face of the waters.* Genesis 1:1-2. And this is because . . .

Life is meaningless without the Holy Spirit

- Before we move to the passage from Acts 2 that I read a bit ago let me point out some things from the powerful passage from Ezekiel that Jeffrey read earlier.
- The prophet is speaking to Judah (and really Israel too) and they are in exile and are dead nations without a future, and absent any hope. But as we heard, we see that by the Holy Spirit life comes back.
- In his vision Ezekiel is shown a valley covered from one side to the other with the dry, dusty, completely devoid of any life, bones of a massacred army. Think about that. Here is a pile of American Bison skulls after Buffalo Hunters practically wiped them out. They were collected to make fertilizer. Pretty creepy, right? Ezekiel was looking at a valley full of HUMAN skeletons.
- David Guzik writes, *“The people represented by these bones were not only dead; they were also disgraced. In the thinking of ancient Israel (and the ancient Near East), an unburied corpse with exposed remains was a shocking disgrace to the dead. These bones were obviously denied proper burial.”*
- Life is meaningless existence until it has given meaning by the indwelling Spirit of God and then the disgrace can be gone. Guzik goes on to make this list of promise in answer to the Lord's question, *“Son of man, can these bones live?”* And I answered, *“O Lord God, you know.”* Ezekiel 37:3

Ezekiel had no hope in the bones, but he did have hope in God.

Ezekiel did not presume to know what God wanted to do with the bones.

Ezekiel was confident that God **DID KNOW**.

- This is what happens when God brings life to dead things – it is the very meaning of **REVIVAL**. God's supernatural power is at work. It's very graphic – you can see in your mind's eye and you can hear the rattling in your mind's ear. First the bones assemble and then they reattach and then ligaments appear and flesh covers it all – but there is still no life. So God tells it Ezekiel to prophesy by the Spirit – the very **BREATH** of God – to bring life. Charles Spurgeon wrote, *“Decayed Churches can most certainly be revived by the preaching of the Word, accompanied by the coming of the heavenly ‘breath’ from the four*

winds. *O Lord, send us such revivals now, for many of thy Churches need them.*” That was in the 1880s and it’s even truer 140 years later.

- But when we are tempted to lose hope because of that, we can know that if there is hope for dead, dry and dusty bones – we, the people of God must never give up hope. In fact, quite to the contrary, as we look at Acts 2 which I read as I opened this talk . . .

THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES WHEN WE WAIT WITH EXPECTATION AND ANTICIPATION

- The disciples – 120 of them, were full of hope as they gathered on the Pentecost Feast day where the priest in the Temple was offering up barley bread, which was the first fruits of the grain harvest. These Christ Followers were awaiting the first fruits of a new era – so *they were all together in one place*. Acts 2:1a. The KJV says *they were all with one accord in one place*. They were together. They had one mind – they were anticipating what God was going to do because they remembered just ten days prior from this that *he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.* Acts 1:4-5.
- They were ready!!! And they knew their need. Guzik writes, *“Before we can be filled, we must recognize our emptiness; by gathering together for prayer, in obedience, these disciples did just that. They recognized they did not have the resources in themselves to do what they could do or should do; they had to instead rely on the work of God.”*
- Last week we talked about how Nicodemus was a teacher of the Law who thought that our standing before God was determined by what we did rather than what God did for us. The Law was good. Dallas Willard wrote, *“Law is good for the soul; it is an indispensable instrument of instruction and a standard of judgment of good and evil.”* But the Pharisees of which Nicodemus was a member had made it into a club to beat people with. Willard goes on, *“One whose aim is anything less than obedience to the law of God in the Spirit and power of Jesus will never have a soul at rest in God and will never advance significantly in spiritual transformation into Christlikeness.”* And that is impossible without the Holy Spirit.
- So it is with that kind of anticipation the disciples were waiting. Do what the disciples did. . .

And the Spirit came

- Wow! It was thunderous. Our text indicates that not only was the house where the disciples were gathered filled with the sound of a rushing wind and tongues of fire appeared and *rested on EACH ONE OF THEM* Acts 2:3 but the entire city of Jerusalem was aware that something powerful was happening. And something WAS happening! The disciples *were filled with the Holy Spirit* Acts 4a. Their hopeful anticipation was paid in full. Guzik writes, *But we should do what the disciples did before and during their filling with the Holy Spirit.* And then he provides another helpful list:

The disciples were filled in fulfillment of a promise.

They were filled as they received in faith.

They were filled in God’s timing.

They were filled as they were together in unity.

They were filled in unusual ways.

- Yes – it was unusual alright! These disciples, who had been filled with the Holy Spirit, *began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.* Acts 2:4b. And then, Peter, who was an unschooled fisherman, preached a sermon for the ages. Unusual barely measures up!
- And then, it happened again . . .

God brought life to dead places

- People, who had just 50 days before been hopeless because Jesus had been crucified and dead in the grave – had seen the Risen Christ and now were experiencing life as they’d never known before. The Jews in Jerusalem who all knew Greek and Aramaic – the languages all people in the region knew – were hearing the languages from the regions they had traveled from to celebrate Pentecost in Jerusalem.
- To say they were amazed is an understatement. These were Galileans who were speaking in other languages. Richard Longenecker writes, *“People from Galilee (Galileans) were known to be uncultured and poor speakers. This was all the more reason to be impressed with their ability to speak eloquently in*

other languages. “Galileans had difficulty pronouncing gutturals and had the habit of swallowing syllables when speaking; so they were looked down upon by the people of Jerusalem as being provincial.” They weren’t being provincial because they were being Spiritual. The Holy Spirit was ministering through them. John Stott writes, “Ever since the early church fathers, commentators have seen the blessing of Pentecost as a deliberate and dramatic reversal of the curse of Babel.” The division that came from humanity’s attempt to be God, was replaced by the unity brought when people who knew they desperately needed God received him in the form of his Holy Spirit.

- Some people told the disciples – GO HOME! YOU’RE DRUNK! And some of them might have believed that – but, mostly, it was probably said in jest. So I think Peter’s response was probably with a smile on his face as he began his powerful sermon with this intro, *Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.* Acts 2:14-15. Will look at that sermon next week as we look at the days and weeks that followed as the new church got down to practicing Pentecost.

Conclusion: Here is our take away, God was bringing life to new places in Acts 2. And he’s still doing that! If you are hopeless to the point you feel like dry and dusty bones – there’s a remedy for that – the Breath of the Holy Spirit. Are you ready for that? Are you seeking him with anticipation and expectation? It’s what it takes. When you sing, *Holy Spirit you are welcome here . . .* do you mean it? God wants to bring you life – actually he wants to bring you **ABUNDANT LIFE** (John 10:10). And he will! He can and will bring revival to all of us and to his Church. Amen.