

Ezekiel 37:1-14  
Psalm 104:25-35, 37  
Acts 2:1-21  
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Blessings upon these words spoken and these words heard, may they be Your words.

Good morning and thank you St. Paul's for hosting us and thank you people of St. Patrick's for coming. We have talked before about possibly worshipping together. We are two small churches with attendance that over the years has dwindled. We find ourselves in a sea of Episcopal churches. One day I counted 5 Episcopal churches that I could drive to from St. Patrick's, each in about 10 minutes. Most of these were built in the 50's, during our nation's highest attendance of church. If you were going to plan it from the get-go at this moment, you wouldn't have quite so many Episcopal churches. And so today, our congregations are smaller and we gather for fellowship! After all, it is the church's birthday! It's good to have a party, liturgical and otherwise.

Our two churches face difficult times, there is no question. And, not to worry, I am not going to dwell on that. First, there is the truth that God is in charge of the future of the church...God HAS this...We can wonder about what church will look like as there are less people who attend church. We have seen this same thing has already happened in Europe, and yet there is a steady rise of church attendance in the global south. Regular attendance at church is now once a month, when it used to be once a week. However, for us to worry about the future church does as much good as the birds or the lilies of the field worrying. God will provide; God does not turn God's back on God's people. Let us also not make any presumption that the future of the church universal is the same as the future of St. Paul's or St. Patrick's. God has been at this relational business with humanity for a long time and we can take some assurance in that.

Ezekiel teaches us about this type of trusting in God. Ezekiel was a prophet during the time of Israel's exile in Babylon. We hear in Ezekiel's writings (or dictation) wild and crazy images...where else in the Bible are you going to get the story of the Valley of Dry Bones? (*dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones*). However, we also hear in Ezekiel hope of an assurance of relationship with the Divine. The theology of the prophet Ezekiel is Davidic, in that there is always the expectation that even though Jerusalem has fallen, God does not turn God's back on Israel, God does not turn God's back on the Davidic covenant. When it feels like God is temporarily turning away, it is God's judgment, which is still part of God's grace and love---the grace of God that then pulls and brings us back. Someday there will be another king on David's throne. God is able to put sinews back on bones, cover them with flesh and put breath in the bodies. You may be skeptical, but even if this image is metaphorical; you get the point. Possibilities are still possibilities, because God's involvement is still present. The wonder that people breathe at all is a testimony to God's involvement. God recreating life in the valley of the dry bones is no less miraculous than life created to begin with.

This breath that animates, that gives life, this very spirit, is akin to or the same as the Holy Spirit in Acts that arrives with wind and fire. We may be well familiar with what can be understood without language, our common humanity---the pain we have from seeing others suffering wherever they are or the joy we have that infects us from the smile of people, particularly children wherever they are. There are enough barriers to understanding. Language understanding language may just be the love of Christ that breaks down barriers. This cacophony of understanding, our very utterances that make us understood in Christ can rise above language. Even though there is this cacophony, God's indwelling of the Spirit is never by accident. God working in us provides a deep understanding of the other, a love that transcends language, skin pigment, nationality, and all barriers. We are called to love beyond the barriers---with intention, not erratically.

This Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the spirit of Jesus dwelling with us, is what gives us Christianity, it is the key to understanding who we are and whose we are. We claim Christ crucified and risen

and are then also claimed. This claim on our heart gives us the deep understanding. It is the birthday of the church that we celebrate today in our little Episcopal Churches. It is the birthday of the church imperfect though she may be, when truth arrives---truth of understanding that comes with the Spirit. The Davidic and Eternal King has arrived and has given truth over confusion. The Gospel of Jesus Christ becomes clear with the illumination of the truth of the Spirit.

*Preached by the Rector of St. Patrick's Episcopal Church at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Bailey's Crossroads at the joint celebration of Pentecost with St. Patrick's Episcopal Church on May 20, 2018.*