

Faith Mennonite Church  
May 24, 2015 – Pentecost  
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**The Spirit breathes new life**  
*Ezekiel 37:1-14*

Mortal, can these bones live? These dry bones? A whole valley full? Can these bones live? It depends on who's asking the question! When mortals—you and me—ask that question, “Can these bones live?” we're usually at the end of our rope. Burned out. Discouraged. Overwhelmed. Disappointed. Feeling abandoned. Let down. In deep grief. Helpless. We can't imagine a positive response to the question.

But in this first reading this morning, it's not the mortal who asks the question but the Spirit of God! God asked the prophet Ezekiel, “Mortal, can these bones live?” And Ezekiel hedged. “O Lord God, you know.” Ezekiel may have had the question framed in his mind but wasn't sure of the answer because this was a dark, difficult time for God's people Israel. They were in captivity. “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely,” they said. They had not fled their homeland as so many refugees do today, but they were carried away, force-marched like many of the original inhabitants of our country were marched off to reservations. Discouraged, abandoned, helpless, in deep grief. And this was not momentary, but generational, like Palestinians who have lived without a homeland for over 50 years and Somali refugees who have been living in a refugee camp in neighboring Kenya for over 20 years.

When Ezekiel couldn't say with confidence, “Yes, I believe these dry bones will live!” the Spirit gave him words to speak. “Prophesy to the bones and say to them, “I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. First, I'll put the muscles and tendons back in place, and then cover with flesh and with skin. Then I will call the breath from the four winds and life will return.” Ezekiel watched a vision of this happening, complete with rattling bones as they began to move and reform. As he prophesied to those bones, he was no doubt rehearsing the words he would say to his people—those discouraged, abandoned, hopeless people. This vision would begin to dispel his own personal doubts and help him to believe the words he was given for others.

I wonder if the disciples of Jesus, gathered in Jerusalem on that first Pentecost following the Passover when Jesus was killed, were feeling a bit like dry bones. Yes, Jesus had appeared to them as the Resurrected One and had departed with the promise that he would send his Spirit, but those must have been difficult days. It's always hard to wait. But wait they did and with an expectation that Jesus was trust-worthy and that which he promised would come true.

When we are feeling like dry bones and have trouble believing that life can return, let us quiet ourselves and let God ask the question, “Can these bones live?” And I am sure that we will hear the answer, “I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live,” most likely in the story of someone sitting close by who recently heard some bones rattling!

**The Spirit leads us into truth**  
*John 15:26-27, 16:4-15*

If there's anything harder than believing life can come to dry bones, it may be believing that the church is guided by the Spirit of Truth that the gospel writer of John describes. We are all too

familiar with the contest of “truths” within the many expressions of Christianity and within our own Mennonite denomination—not just at present but throughout church history. How do we understand this Spirit of Truth? Can we find a common truth?

First, it’s important to remember that John’s gospel is first and foremost concerned about *relationship*. Remember the story of Nicodemus? Jesus spoke of being “born again” into a new relationship with God. And the text we had three Sundays ago about “abiding in the vine”? Again, it’s about relationship. And here at the end of John 15 the word translated as “Advocate” also translates as “Paraclete” – parallel + to call, thus “One who is called to come along side us” in relationship.<sup>1</sup>

In the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, Jesus describes the action of this “One who is called to come along side us” as “convincing the world about sin and righteousness and judgement.” This sounds fairly heavy, but the “convincing” here is about exposing or laying open the reality of the world, much of which is not in relationship with God.. Sin, in John’s gospel, is not about moral activity but about relationship, or lack thereof. One sins by not believing or nurturing a relationship with God. Similarly, righteousness is also described in terms of relationship: of Jesus leaving the disciples to be present with God. And judgement comes when we are in collusion with the ruler of the world, who has been condemned, rather than in communion with God through Jesus. So the Truth that comes through the Spirit is not about getting it right in terms of understanding, doctrine, or creed—perfect agreement—but about being sincere in seeking a relationship with God.

Jesus said it was better for the disciples that he depart so that the Advocate, the Paraclete, could come and lead into all truth. Certainly Jesus, as a mortal, could only be in one place at one time. The Paraclete, the One who is called to come along side us, is in every place at every time. As I visited with Andi Kuenning and Dan Leisen yesterday, talking about the recent death of Andi’s mother Charlotte, we reflected on how death allows for us to get to know a person better than we knew them in life. We share stories, through obituaries and memorial services, and the one who has departed all of a sudden has an amplified presence among us and with our extended community. In preparing his disciples for his departure, Jesus said that he taught what he received from God, and that the Spirit will teach us what it receives from him. So we receive truth as we deepen our relationship with the Spirit and as we reflect on and dwell in the stories that Jesus told.

Just as the church celebrates Easter not as a single day but a season (these weeks between Easter and Pentecost), so now we celebrate the day of Pentecost as the beginning of a new season, the season of Pentecost (which continues until Advent). This summer our worship will focus on the parables of Jesus. The parables were the heart of Jesus’ teaching and as we read and reflect on them again I believe the Spirit will lead us into ever greater truth, a deeper relationship with the One who is called to come along side us.

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<sup>1</sup> Working preacher podcast, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org), May 16, 2015.