

May 20, 2018

Pentecost Sunday

Gospel

John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

*[Jesus said,] <sup>26</sup>“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. <sup>27</sup>You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.*

*<sup>16:4b</sup>“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. <sup>5</sup>But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ <sup>6</sup>But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. <sup>7</sup>Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup>And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup>about sin, because they do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup>about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; <sup>11</sup>about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.*

*<sup>12</sup>“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup>He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup>All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”*

“Can these bones live?” This is question that comes from God to the prophet Ezekiel as he is standing over a large valley that was full of bones. “Mortal, can these bones live” asks God? I am guessing that for the parents of our seven confirmands today, (for the two Zachs, Bella, Grace, Colin, Casey, David), (for the parents of the children getting baptized), there have been times when they have gazed upon you (their child) and wondered “Can these bones live?” I do not only mean the parents concern for the health and safety of their children, but also just maybe our seven confirmands and on occasion done some knucklehead things in life, some things in which we maybe wish to take back, some things which have caused those around you to shake their heads, and your (the confirmand) parents have said out loud: “Can these bones live?”

Well, for today, the parents of our seven confirmands today, (for the two Zachs, Bella, Grace, Colin, Casey, David), today is one of those days that

as you affirm your baptism, as you confirm your faith, this is one moment in which we say “Yes” to that question – these bones can live. Today, as the confirmands turn another corner in their faith journey, it is reassuring that they are recognizing God’s presence in their lives.

This does not mean that they will suddenly become angel-like, if that was the case our confirmation class would be 200 kids strong I’m sure, but what it means is that whatever happens in this life, recognizing that God is a part of it, is so key.

God, in the Holy Spirit, as told by Jesus in today’s Gospel text, is ever present. God, in the Holy Spirit, becomes our advocate, becomes our agitator, becomes our comfort, becomes our constant companion. God never forsakes us.

There are moments in all of our lives, not just when we are in 8th grade complete our confirmation, but all of our lives when we experience the valley of human existence. This means we experience failure, we experience sickness, we experience loved ones dying around us, we experience bad news, we experience disappointment, we experience anxiety, we experience depression. And what I want to emphasize to our confirmands is that it is not just them that experiences these things sometimes. Every person in this room has valleys, rough patches, deserts, and struggles in this life. We do not always understand why that is, but we understand that it is a certainty sometimes in our lives. And perhaps sometimes we feel like we are standing at the valley and we are asking the same question God asks the prophet Ezekiel: “Can these bones live?” We may not just ask it of ourselves, of our family members, of our friends, of our country, of our world – we may also honestly ask it sometimes of our faith, and certainly sometimes of the church itself. “Can these bones live?”

All of us in this room, (even the babies baptized), even the confirmands have grown up in the Star Wars era, and it seems like the appeal of it is not going to slow down very soon either, with all the popularity, vacation attractions, and coming movies. If there is one thing that I think the movies have contributed to the Christian faith is not only the classic battle between Good and Evil but what is most fascinating about the movie, in addition to all the future technology that the film portrays with such success, but rather it is something that George Lucas called the Force. One of the early heroes we know is Luke Skywalker, a young person eager to make a

difference, and in the end, he does make a difference, because he tunes into the force. The force in the movie is like God, like the Holy Spirit, it consists of the life source, the life soul, and that force, once you tune into it, can be used to do good. The force is stronger than machinery, stronger than any technology, stronger in fact than anything that was, is, or ever will be, and it is all around, to be touched and felt and responded to, whenever one is ready for it. Luke saves the rebels from destruction in the first movie by remembering the force, and concentrating on the force, and allowing the force to guide his actions. Luke is not perfect in this he does not easily open himself up to the force, but, in the end, he does manage to tune in, and the Force does work through him, to the ending of the movie.

In comparative ways, the Force is much like the force at the heart of the Christian faith - that which we call the Holy Spirit. That Spirit, is the power of God and the essence of God. That Spirit is the power which upholds the universe itself, that Spirit is that which was poured out upon the first believers in Christ on the day of Pentecost.

So, the answer to the question: "Can these bones live?" as is witnessed at the Pentecost event we heard in Acts, is the like that which we hear again in some of those verses from the Ezekiel text: "Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ... 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. 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 he said to me, "Prophecy 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 he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude." He then just a few verses later adds this: "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."

So, can these bones live? Can I rise up above depression, bad news, failures, and when things do not go my way in my life? Can even the church rise up, even when it experiences hard times, even when it has disagreements and divisions, even if only a few people show up, even if

congregations close, even when people are bored or have doubts or fade away? The answer shown in the valley of dry bones is a resounding yes. In all our prayers for the confirmands (for Bella, Grace, Colin, Casey, David, and perhaps especially for the two Zachs) and the newly baptized, we pray for the Holy Spirit's indwelling. In all our thoughts about God we understand the Spirit of God to be that which is effective – it leads us, it teaches us, it convicts us, and it also communicates the forgiveness of God, it gives us dreams and visions, it helps us to understand them, it comforts us, it sustains us, it inspires us, it strengthens us, and it renews us, and in the end it draws us closer to each other, and to Jesus Christ and to God our Creator who are one.

It is the Spirit that makes our faith come alive and it is the Spirit that does the work of salvation in our daily lives. It is the Spirit that reminds us, and surprises us with the glory, and the power, and the joy of life in God's care. The Spirit is all around us, and within us – that is what the day of Pentecost means, this is what we affirm today. We strive to let that Spirit catch us, to rise up from inside us, and impact us all our lives – even when we doubt, even when we stumble, even when we feel like our very bones are dry. So, to the confirmands, and to all of us, think about our dreams, listen to what people around us are really saying, stop and read the word that the wise have always held up before us, the Word that the Spirit uses in such wonderful ways at times to comfort us or to challenge us. Hear the visions that other people speak of, visions of change towards wholeness, of justice and of acts of love and mercy and devotion. Expect to be surprised by God. Expect good things to occur, believe in the Spirit, the power of God, and the gift of the church. Amen.