

Message #1045
Rev. Jack C. Longley

"THE DAY THE CHURCH CAME TO LIFE"
{Acts 1:1-14; 2:1-4}

Trinity Presbyterian Church
February 1, 2004

INTRODUCTION

I want to go on record this morning by saying that I believe that there is great hope for the church in the twenty-first century.

...I haven't given up

...I cannot give up

...The church is far from perfect--but it's our best hope!

Having said that I also want to state that I feel the church is in dire need of a fresh Pentecost; however, for that to happen...

...the church of Jesus Christ must WANT that to happen

...be willing to pay the price for it to happen

...and believe God that it WILL happen!

DRY BONES

I'm part of an small group that is discussing what can be done to revitalize our denomination. We've come to the conclusion that the Presbyterian Church {U.S.A.} has lost its focus and needs to regain its passion.

...that could probably be said of most--if not all--the churches within our presbytery {I'm not in a position to speak for the entire denomination}

...that could probably be said of most--if not all--the members of these churches.

I have committed myself in the years I have remaining in my ministry--whether they are at Trinity or elsewhere--to finding answers to this dilemma.

Is there hope for the church? Yes!

Is there hope for our church? Yes!

But regaining passion, vision, and focus must begin within individuals--in you and in me...then it will spread to small groups...gaining momentum until it affects the whole church!

The church needs to come to life!

I love the account of Ezekiel's encounter with God found in the 37th chapter of the Old Testament Prophetic Book...

"The hand of the Lord was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.

He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?'

"I said, 'O Sovereign Lord, You alone know!'

"Then He said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I WILL make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and YOU WILL COME TO LIFE. Then you will know that I am the Lord!'

"So, I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a

noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

"Then He said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath; prophecy son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live!' So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army!" {37:1-10}

That's it!

That's precisely what we need!

WE NEED THAT BREATH OF FRESH AIR TODAY

We read in John 20:21-22..

"Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you.' And with that He breathed on them and said, 'RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT...!'"

It was Edwin Hatch who penned these words in that well known hymn...

"Breathe on me, breath of God. Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love, and do what Thou wouldst do.
Breathe on me, breath of God, Until my heart is pure.
Until with Thee I will one will, to do and to endure.
Breathe on me, breath of God, 'till I am wholly Thine,
Until this earthly part of me glows with Thy fire divine."

How can it happen you ask? Listen, let me tell you about...

...THE DAY THE CHURCH CAME TO LIFE

"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ALL OF THEM WERE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT and began to speak in tongues as the Spirit enabled them." {Acts 2:1-4}

Following Jesus' resurrection--and prior to His ascension--He gave specific instructions to these disciples preparing them for this incredible awakening.

...they weren't ready yet

...they needed to be in the right place--both physically and spiritually--for God to work the miracle at Pentecost!

"He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while He was eating with them, He gave them this command: 'DO NOT leave Jerusalem, but WAIT for the GIFT My Father promised which you have heard Me speak about.'" {Acts 1:3b-4}

Instructions: "WAIT...DO NOT LEAVE JERUSALEM!"

...stay put

...listen to that still small voice within

...don't launch any new plans and agendas

The key for receiving God's promise...WAIT!

The Psalmist wrote...

"I waited PATIENTLY for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry..." {Psalm 40:1}

Again he wrote...

"Be still before the Lord and wait PATIENTLY for Him..." {Psalm 37:7a}

Isaiah wrote...

"Those who wait on the Lord will find new strength. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint." {Isaiah 40:31 LB}

We spend so little time "WAITING PATIENTLY" on the Lord!

...we plan and strategize

...we have discussions

...we study books

...but, how much time is spent "waiting patiently?"

Following instructions came the promise--

"For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit...{and} you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth!" {Acts 1:5, 8}

...if you wait...you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit

...if you wait...you will be infused with power

...if you wait...you will come alive

...what incredible promises.

And after He said that, Jesus ascended into Heaven and they were given yet another promise that He would return just as He went! They followed instructions...they waited...and they prayed!

"They returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives...they went upstairs...{and} they all joined together constantly in prayer..." {Acts 1:12a, 14a}

...they had no where to turn

...Jesus was gone

...yet, He'd made many promises

...a comforter

...a helper

...an internal presence

...so, they prayed...and they waited!

CONCLUSION

The church CAN come alive again!

The dead bones can receive the breath of the Spirit and come to life

You can come alive again...and be renewed and refilled by the Holy Spirit!

Renewal--spiritual awakening--comes...

...to the one who is willing to let go...and believe God!

...to the one who waits on the Lord and prays earnestly

...not sentence prayers

...not generic prayers

...but earnest, sincere, heartfelt prayers.

James wrote...

"The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective!" {4:16b}

In the Old Testament we read...

"If My people who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land {church}! My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to their prayers offered in this place..." {II Chronicles 7:14-15a}

God isn't interested in our plans!

God wants us to listen for His plans!

Your prayers are powerful!

When you pray God will then endue you with His power!
Let's stop quenching the Holy Spirit...and be open to everything and anything God has in store for us!

...let's stop quickie {get it over asap} prayers with God

...let's talk with God...

...let's listen to God

...let's receive His promise

...and, let's come alive!