

**Where Did the Dry Bones Come From? A Message for Pentecost**  
**Sermon by Rev. Katherine Raley**  
**First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Colorado Springs, CO**  
**May 24, 2015 (Pentecost Sunday)**

**Ezekiel 37:1-14**

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord."

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, "Prophesy 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.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 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."

I have to admit, it *is* a little strange using the imagery of a valley full of dry bones with the weather we have been having lately! There isn't anything "dry" about it!

Today is Pentecost Sunday – the birthday of the Church, the Sunday that we remember when the Holy Spirit descends on the people like tongues of flame, and a crowd who moments before had been speaking all different languages can all of a sudden *understand*.

Since the Scripture text that we read is *not* this traditional story of Pentecost, I do want to read that story for you now.

**Acts 2:1-12**

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs--in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"*

And then the disciples are sent out into the world, to be the church, *yet again*. And this time, it seems to stick. Yes, they had been sent before, by Jesus the living teacher among them, then by Jesus the resurrected Son of God, and now, by the Holy Spirit of God, ignited with passion that overcomes the barriers that had kept people apart from one another, kept people from understanding one another, kept people's passions from being truly roared into flame.

Alongside this traditional Pentecost text, I have put in front of you another kind of text, from the Hebrew Bible this time. This passage, too, talks about renewed, about the enabled ability to do something that wasn't able to be done before, but for a different reason. The dry bones of Ezekiel aren't about barriers being removed, or languages, like walls, being broken down. The dry bones are about *tongues*, giving the gift of language, being put *back* into our bodies. Maybe like bridges being built, but these were supposed to be there always, but something happened, and they are there no longer. Something happened, and the flesh and marrow was stripped away, and the *dry bones* left as the only evidence of that great people.

God brings Ezekiel the prophet to witness these bones - a valley full of them. And as God speaks to Ezekiel and Ezekiel speaks to the bones, something begins to happen. Suddenly, these are

not just bones. The bones are still there, but there are now living cells within them, and these cells are growing and multiplying, and they are building bone marrow, flesh, muscle, tendon, organs – heart, lung, stomach, intestine, brain. The cells multiply into blood, skin covers the flesh, and the blood pumps through, and those dry bones now have a river of life-giving and sustaining movement of rich healthy blood moving around and over them.

These images are hope in the midst of a dust-filled desert of questions, and absence. They are promise *and* fulfillment all in one. They are the flesh-imagined promise of the Holy Spirit power on Pentecost, when new life is infused to confused and saddened people.

But there's something about those dry bones – bones do not exist by themselves; bones come from what once was life. In order for those dry bones to be in that valley, there had to be life, first, and then, all the symbols of life were stripped away – first breath, then skin, and sinews.

And it makes me wonder – if those bones are to be metaphor for *us* – for our lives, for our faith, for our relationship to God...exactly what do our bones look like right now? Are we full-bodied, living, breathing? Are we dry boned, the life long since stripped away?

Neither. We are not at either end of the spectrum. We are somewhere in between. We have the life force of God's spirit within us because God promised it to us and because God put in us the day that we celebrate as the birthday of the church. But, we have also stripped away some of what we need to live, as well. There are bones exposed because of what we have stripped away, and God is offering us, on this Pentecost Sunday, the opportunity to look and see what *could* be.

There are two kinds in this imagery in this text that I especially want us to see today in our context.

First, these are bones, these are *body*, and this is *body* imagery. We are *embodied* people, not just spirits that ignore the body or bodies that ignore the spirit, but God lives in both body *and* spirit.

And then there is *synergy imagery* – bone connecting to bone: telling us that we are *connected* people. When we strip away the other parts of us that we need, we are not stripping away *tainted* flesh, we are stripping away the body that enlivens and strengthens our spirit, our soul, our work that God has given us to do. Our hope and our promise and our fulfillment are all here in those connected bones and sinews.

These images remind us of the connections that we need and the bodies that make them happen.

So what is it that we need to talk about today? What are the connections that we have stripped away, what are the body images that we have ignored and pushed aside? What do we need to talk about, church? Because we *are* the church. We are the people whom God has given us God's work to do, to tell others of the good news, to remind each and every person on this earth that they are beloved. We cannot ignore those other parts of ourselves, and pretend that these bones can live on their own. So what do we need to talk about?

Do we need to talk about sex? Do we need to talk about prostitution/trafficking. Disease? Homelessness? Racism? Other faiths that we have pushed aside? Our marriages and families? Our work and employment?

We cannot ignore the things that we have lived into that are not part of God's desire for us. We can't ignore the systems of racism that we participate in, and we cannot pretend that we have nothing to do with them.

We cannot pretend that we are not sexual people, and push our bodies away from us until we have dried out our very bones, or until we have dried out *other* people's bones by using their bodies for our own purposes.

We cannot allow ourselves to be ignorant of the lives and stories of people who share our desire to live out faithful lives, but whose practice of that has looked different from our own.

We are *embodied* people. We are *connected* people. On this Pentecost Sunday, on this Sunday when God is teaching us, again, about the spirit-life-breath that God has for us, what do we

need to talk about? Where do we find ourselves *disconnecting* from the flesh, sinew, breath that should be surrounding our bones?

The week before last I had the opportunity to attend the Festival of Homiletics, or preaching, in Denver, a festival, a feast of preachers and people from around the country who have been good at their art and who are speaking prophetically. One of those preachers spoke about an experience she'd had at her church recently, when she had prepared a sermon on Genesis 28, a story about Jacob wrestling with God. But there was a small typo in the bulletin, and instead of the scripture reader reading Genesis 28, he read Genesis 38 instead, and the congregation gathered heard the story about Tamar, the ancestor of Jesus who became pregnant through the means of prostitution, and they heard about seed being spilled and one person going into another person, and it was interesting scripture lesson that morning. It wasn't what you hear in church every morning, and this preacher said, the scripture was being read, and she saw the congregation's eyes open wider, and people sitting up a little straighter. Right after it was read, she came to speak, and everyone was kind of grinning at her – what are you going to talk about? What are we going to hear this morning? And she *didn't* have a sermon prepared on Genesis 38. She told them that, and as soon as she said, "that's not what I'm preaching on," there was a collective "aww" from the congregation – an expression of disappointment. Why? Because that's what they wanted to hear about – one because it was sexy and weird, but two because it was relevant. It was something that doesn't get talked about in church very much, and it was something the people were hungry for – what does *that* have to do with how we are living out our faithful lives?

So church, what do *we need* to talk about this morning? What are you hungry to hear, what needs to be part of our conversations as we are living out our Christian lives, on a Pentecost Sunday when God is reminding us who we are?

Are we drying our own bones? Or are we working to keep connections, reminding ourselves that we are embodied people, that we have relationships?

Are we working to connect our bodies, minds, and spirits to those around us who might enliven our bones?

Are we finding what our Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist brothers and sisters have to teach us?

Are we stripping ourselves of our bodies, of the things that embarrass us, that we don't want to admit to, especially in church? Or are we *talking* about them, so that we can tell the difference between those things that need to be let go, the things that need to be pruned away, as Pastor Chuck talked about last week, and the things that are actually a part of the life and spirit that God has for us?

If we are asking ourselves the question, what do we need to talk about, let's ask it and answer it. I invite you to *answer* it this morning – write it down and hand it to me after the service; email me if you have your phone right now; tell your pastors what we need to be talking about. What are the things that are relevant in your lives that you need to know how to fulfill that Pentecost spirit? What do we need to talk about? Where have we gotten disconnected? Where do we need to build up the flesh and heart and spirit over our bones again? Tell us. Answer that question, because God is going to keep asking us, Can these bones live?

Can these bones live? *Yes*. Because God lives in the flesh of your bones, and in the relationships we build with the people of our world.

Can these bones live? *Yes*, God answers, *yes*.