

Ezekiel 37:1-14

1 The LORD's power overcame me, and while I was in the LORD's spirit, he led me out and set me down in the middle of a certain valley. It was full of bones. 2 He led me through them all around, and I saw that there were a great many of them on the valley floor, and they were very dry. 3 He asked me, "Human one, can these bones live again?" I said, "LORD God, only you know." 4 He said to me, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, Dry bones, hear the LORD's word! 5 The LORD God proclaims to these bones: I am about to put breath in you, and you will live again. 6 I will put sinews on you, place flesh on you, and cover you with skin. When I put breath in you, and you come to life, you will know that I am the LORD." 7 I prophesied just as I was commanded. There was a great noise as I was prophesying, then a great quaking, and the bones came together, bone by bone. 8 When I looked, suddenly there were sinews on them. The flesh appeared, and then they were covered over with skin. But there was still no breath in them. 9 He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, human one! Say to the breath, The LORD God proclaims: Come from the four winds, breath! Breathe into these dead bodies and let them live." 10 I prophesied just as he commanded me.

When the breath entered them, they came to life and stood on their feet, an extraordinarily large company. 11 He said to me, "Human one, these bones are the entire house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely finished.' 12 So now, prophecy and say to them, The LORD God proclaims: I'm opening your graves! I will raise you up from your graves, my people, and I will bring you to Israel's fertile land. 13 You will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and raise you up from your graves, my people. 14 I will put my breath in you, and you will live. I will plant you on your fertile land, and you will know that I am the LORD. I've spoken, and I will do it. This is what the LORD says."

Acts 2:1-21

1 When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. 4 They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak. 5 There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages. 7 They were surprised and amazed, saying, "Look, aren't all the people who are speaking Galileans, every one of them? 8 How then can each of us hear them speaking in our native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; as well as residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya bordering Cyrene; and visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), 11 Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!" 12 They were all surprised and bewildered. Some asked each other, "What does this mean?" 13 Others jeered at them, saying, "They're full of new wine!" 14 Peter stood with the other eleven apostles. He raised his voice and declared, "Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem! Know this! Listen carefully to my words! 15 These people aren't drunk, as you suspect; after all, it's only nine o'clock in the morning! 16 Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 17 In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young will see visions. Your elders will dream dreams. 18 Even upon my

servants, men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. 19 I will cause wonders to occur in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and a cloud of smoke. 20 The sun will be changed into darkness, and the moon will be changed into blood, before the great and spectacular day of the Lord comes. 21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

John 15:26-27; 16:12-15

26 "When the Companion comes, whom I will send from the Father—the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me. 27 You will testify too, because you have been with me from the beginning. 12 "I have much more to say to you, but you can't handle it now. 13 However, when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you in all truth. He won't speak on his own, but will say whatever he hears and will proclaim to you what is to come. 14 He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and proclaim it to you. 15 Everything that the Father has is mine. That's why I said that the Spirit takes what is mine and will proclaim it to you."

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Father,
God's Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit:
Amen.

Do I have a story for you! Oh, that reminds me! I need to tell you about this. When someone has a story to tell, we know it, because they let us know. They let us know they care about it through their commitment to and enthusiasm in sharing the story. They feel compelled, somehow, to tell, as though there's a deep seated need to share that story. The time we caught the big fish. The time we went on our favorite vacation. The time we one the big game or met our favorite celebrity. There are some stories that

even the most introverted person amongst us wants to share with others.

We tell stories about certain times in our lives, and today we enter our time in the life of the church.

Pentecost, the day the Holy Spirit comes to give life to the Body of Christ, to enliven the church, signals the end of the Easter seasons and the beginning of ordinary time. Now, I don't know about you, but fiery doesn't seem ordinary. Speaking languages we've never learned doesn't seem ordinary. Knitting together dead dry bones doesn't seem ordinary. That stuff seems special, a gift, a wonder. That's the life of the Holy Spirit, one that brings radically holy work into our everyday lives. That's what makes this ordinary time, that through the Holy Spirit, we daily live a life

deeply connected to the heart of God. That's the **extra**ordinary life of the church. So what, then, do we make of ordinary time? What's this life for? The Spirit of Pentecost comes to make us witnesses.

Unfortunately, the word witness seems to carry a bunch of baggage in our culture, and for all sorts of reasons. Some of us know all too well the bad stories of being witnessed to with tracts and threats of damnation. In other words, some people have given witnessing to Jesus a bad name, and we don't want to be identified with that negativity, that condemnation, so we don't share our stories of Jesus. Others people are afraid to be witnesses because, in mobster lingo, snitches and talkers get stitches and walkers. It can be dangerous to be a witness in our

legal system, whether that means threat of injury or witness protection or just loss of work and time with family as we're required to attend the court. Now, witnessing to God isn't like telling on Al Capone, but it is risky. It requires something of us, and puts us in a place of vulnerability. And, it seems, some people are afraid to witness because they're not sure what to say or what to do. Witnesses must have to have a story to tell.

Maybe that's a better way to look at this, or phrase this. The Spirit of Pentecost, God's Holy Spirit, comes to make us storytellers. We read in Acts about the church's first Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the church, appearing as tongues of fire on all of their heads, and enabled them to speak in

languages from around the world. Why? To share the story of Jesus with all people. Of course, this was a dangerous time, because Jesus had died and rose again in defiance of the grave and in rebellion against Rome's power to kill. To speak the name of Jesus was to challenge the authority of Caesar. And there were other so-called witnesses, slandering the resurrection and saying the disciples stole the body, all despite the fact that Jesus was seen across the countryside and touched in his side after his resurrection. In the midst of this world, God called the early church to become witnesses, to become storytellers about God's gracious work amongst us. On Easter, God gave the story and on Pentecost, called us to tell the story.

One of the incredible things about this Pentecost moment in the church's life is that it is the unmaking of another Biblical story. Remember the Tower of Babel? People thought they could control God, that they could be a tower tall enough to enter the heavens, not only to get close to God but to keep God in the tower's temple, to control access to God. People set themselves up as idols, for anyone who could control God surely became a god themselves, right? So God confused the language of people to prevent them from even harsher consequences of their idolatry. On Pentecost, God reverses the story. We don't need a tower to come to God because God comes to us. We don't need to make a temple for God because the Holy Spirit now dwells in each of

us. And even the division brought upon by our ancestor's sin is no obstacle, for God brings us the gift of new languages, so that we can share the gift of God's story amongst us without impedance.

But it seems we're hesitant to tell stories, or at least to tell God stories. Now, when I say God stories, I mean any tale we tell where God is an actor, a main character, so much so that we speak God's name, whether that's Jesus or Holy Spirit or Abba Father, however we name God. For some reason, we're much less likely to tell these stories than we are willing to share about our most recent trip to Disney world or the amount of traffic we saw on 81. Now I'm sure there's countless reasons for this tendency, but a few rise to the surface. We talk about Disney world or any

special event like that because of how much fun we had, about how much we enjoy and appreciate the story itself. At times, it's hard for us to find enjoyment in the God stories and we're afraid others won't find any either. When we share traffic stories, we're often sharing information we find useful or helpful.

Sometimes, we're afraid that people won't find any use in the God stories, that the God stories just won't be helpful.

There's another reason, I think, and one that's even more fundamental. Sometimes, it's hard for us to see God involved in our story at all. Even the strongest believers amongst us aren't always sure how to see God. To my knowledge, tongues of fire haven't flopped up on anyone's head recently –

though maybe if I died my hair red, we could simulate that – so it's a bit more difficult to identify where God is at work in the world. We don't want to be wrong, and we don't want to mislead people, so we just don't tell God stories at all.

Part of the reality of Pentecost is that recognition, that it's sometimes hard to see God at work. That was a special event, one that doesn't happen every day. This doesn't mean that God isn't working, but rather, that it's hard for us to see through the darkness of sin and perceive the light of Christ. Not every day looks like the day of Pentecost. And though tongues of fire seem to fade, we're left to not only tell God's story, but to learn to recognize that story in the world. We're left with the responsibility to learn the

languages we need to speak that story to others.

We're left with the work of discernment and the call to share that story.

And you see, that's what makes this ordinary time. The Spirit that lit their hair on fire is the same Spirit alive inside of us. The Spirit that put flesh upon Israel's dry bones is the same one tied up in the sinews of our souls. The Spirit that Jesus promised is our companion, the one guiding us to look for truth, and when we see that truth, to speak that truth in the world. We are not left alone to look for God's stories, or to learn how to tell them. The Holy Spirit remains, alive and well within us, pointing us toward the God stories in the world.

And goodness do we have stories to tell! Many of you have shared, at various points, times and places where this church has been a gift for you in a time of need. That's a God story! That was the work of the Spirit making a group of people into the Body of Christ. Others have shared how, in times of judgment and anger, you found moments of compassion or places of welcome. That's a God story! That was the work of the Spirit leading you beyond hatred and into the sacred. Even yesterday, when I sat at a Waffle House with friends from Germany who I hadn't seen for two years, Holy Spirit showed up in a powerful way. Not in tongues of fire. And no, I didn't start speaking German. But across two years of time, it was as though not a moment had passed. Our friendship,

our sisterhood and brotherhood in Christ, was all the same. That was God at work in our relationships, binding us together and giving us an hour of joy that will help us endure the unknown future until we meet again. And trust me, if we can see God in a Waffle House, then we know God's at work everywhere.

God's at work in the world, dear friends, and part of what we must learn is that language of speaking God's name, of recognizing God at work in the normalcy of our lives. Our ordinary time is one constantly lived alongside the Holy Spirit inside us, so we must learn to speak that language into reality, to tell those stories of our lives, because those are the stories of God at work in the world through us.

The other language we must learn to speak is the cultural language of others. Being a good storyteller means learning what's important to other people so we know what stories are worth sharing. We've all been held hostage by the storyteller who takes twenty five minutes to tell a five minute story and adds twenty minutes of meaningless detail, right? Instead, we've got to learn what matters to those around us, so that we can connect the story of God to the story of their lives. That's ultimately our commission as storytellers, as witnesses. Not just sharing an entertaining narrative, but sharing a story about the kind of life-changing truth we know in Jesus.

Though we can't see that tongue of fire, that's alright. It's now in our hearts, in our bones, in our mouths, inspiring stories of God at work in the world. At Pentecost, God came down and made the church grow because they told stories about Jesus. Today, in the beginning of our ordinary time, God is calling us to the very same thing. Let's speak the name of Jesus, tell people more about the love of our Abba, and tell stories about how God's worked in our lives. Who knows? Maybe our tongues will turn to fire and grow a community burning for Christ. I'm excited about that, and about where God is moving amongst us. Amen.