

This Sunday's texts:

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Acts 2:1-21

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

Purpose and Power

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The holy Gospel for this Pentecost Sunday comes to us from the Gospel of John the 15th and 16th chapters:

But I will send you the Advocate - the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me. And you must also testify about me because you have been with me from the beginning of my ministry. ... Yes, I am telling these things to you now, so that when they happen, you will remember my warning. I didn't tell you earlier because I was going to be with you for a while longer. But now I am going away to the one who sent me, and not one of you was asking where I'm going. Instead, you grieve because of what I told you. But in fact, it is best for you that I go, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me. Righteousness is available because I go to the father and you will see me no more. Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged. There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, "The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me."

The gospel of the Lord. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, on this Pentecost Sunday, we give you thanks for the redemption that you bring to us for your church. We thank you for the Holy Spirit that is alive and it works in our lives and in our midst and in our ministries. We pray that you would fill this day with purpose and with power. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Happy Pentecost! Pentecost is said to be the birthday of the Church and so it is a Celebration Sunday, a celebration of when the promised Holy Spirit arrived on the scene and empowered the disciples and began the ministry of the Church, a ministry which has changed the world, a ministry always empowered by God. So it's a birthday celebration. In the next twelve months, both I and Saint Timothy's will celebrate our 60th birthdays. Maybe I should be feeling old, but I don't. And maybe Saint Timothy's should be feeling old, but I don't think we do.

I want to say something about birthdays. Birthdays aren't really the beginning of things, as they suggest they are, because they come out of a legacy. The birth of a baby only happens because of the life of the parents and their lives of their parents before them. The same is true with the Church. The Church was born out of a long journey of God's redemptive work in the world, going all the way back to the Fall. It was a long period of time in which the coming of the Messiah was predicted and there was that time of 50 days that we are just now celebrating from the resurrection to this day, the day of Pentecost. God is at work ahead of us, God is at work in our lives, and God will be at work in the days to come.

We have this incredible privilege to be part of it, not because we're worthy because we're not, not because we're capable because without God we are not, but because of the indwelling presence and power of God at work in and through us, we are the church. It is an exciting time to be the church. When most of you hear this sermon, it will likely either be on Sunday or past Sunday and it will be the first time I've had an opportunity to preach to this community of faith in this sanctuary, this place set aside for God's purpose, set aside for worship in the one true God, Jesus Our Savior and Lord. What a privilege it is to be in this place and be proclaiming his word in this place. The anticipation has been great and the sense of anticipation for what is to come is building.

It's been an interesting journey, this period of waiting. I think it was for God's people as they awaited the coming of the Messiah. I think it was for the disciples even in that fifty-day period between the time Jesus rose from the dead and the time the Spirit came at Pentecost. And certainly, this COVID time has felt like a period of dryness, a period of stillness. Maybe even honestly and truly, a period of death.

So it seems so powerful that the first lesson given for us today was the lesson from Ezekiel. It seems so powerful that there would be this message about the dry bones, this message about how God's prophetic word could bring life out of utter and complete death and despair. The dry bones in the valley that Ezekiel is told by God to prophesy to are very likely the bones of God's people who were killed in a battle that they lost. They were not victorious. They were defeated. They were not only dead. They were dead and dried out. There really isn't any more despairing image that can be painted.

So God turns to Ezekiel and He asked him the question, "Can these dry bones live?" We all know that the answer is of course not! Ezekiel's a little smarter than that and he says, "Only you know. Only *you* know. Only you, the God who creates life, the God who has the power to create life from nothing. It's you. You're the one that understands what can or cannot be done in these circumstances of death and despair." God doesn't simply act. He invites Ezekiel to be a part of the life-giving act. He says to Ezekiel to prophesy to these bones. Ezekiel tells the bones to do what God says, come together and take on flesh and receive breath and life, be the people of God, be the army of God that will carry the work and providence of God forward in the world. You may have *thought* you were defeated. You may have *thought* all hope was gone, but it is not.

I don't think that our lives have been as despairing as that, but they've certainly been despairing. I don't know if they've been as hopeless as a valley of dry bones, but there were many times of hopelessness, certainly not knowing what the future would hold, and certainly be more in the spirit of self-preservation than actively engaging the world, but God is present. God's spirit is present. God's power is present and just as Ezekiel, God has the power to say to us, his church, you be my prophet. You be my spirit bearer. You be my life-giver to the world by sharing the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus with everyone. You see, that's the story of Pentecost. In the book of Acts and in Luke, which are combined as a set of two writings from the Apostle Luke, we hear the words "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the world."

But wait. Don't like that word. Don't that calling. Honestly, I haven't liked it, that is, that calling at Saint Tim's. It sort of felt like one of the effects of covid was God saying to me you

know when you get to Saint Timothy's to serve as I called you to do, you're going to have to go a little slower than you normally have. You're going to have to start a little more gradually than you typically do, when you run off ahead of me, Jim. And I trust, not by what I see or by what I've experienced, but because of God's promise. I trust that it will be one of those things that God will use for good, even though I didn't like it.

But today's a new day. Today is a new beginning. We have waited and while we're not yet fully re-engaged after the pandemic, it's still going on. But there is an opening. There is a new beginning that is starting to happen. There is some anticipation that's starting to build for the coming back of ministries and programs and developing them and strengthening them and going out into this world and making a difference in the lives of people for the sake of the Gospel. We are ready to be filled with the spirit of God, so that we can be witnesses for God in the world. That is our calling and it is God's work in and through us.

Two weeks ago, we heard from Bishop Selbo that God's work in the church is and goes as far as the church is willing to work through God. It was a strong word of encouragement, I think. It was a word that kept us realizing that we have to or that we're called to, no, that we're invited and privileged to join God on this mission. He sends his Holy Spirit to us to do that very thing. I sometimes want to think that God will simply get on board and bless and multiply whatever I want to do. More and more I realize that no, no, no, God invites us to experience the amazing blessing of how his spirit can work in and through us to accomplish that which God wants to accomplish. It's an incredible privilege to be invited into that place.

So I want us to hear more deeply into these words of Jesus in the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of John. I actually want us to think about that text maybe throughout the week. I want to encourage you to read through John 13 through 17. This is what's called "The Farewell Discourse." It's a setting in the Gospel of John that happens all on the last day of Jesus' life before he goes to the cross. It elevates its importance. It helps us to understand that this is the heart of what Jesus wanted to communicate to his disciples, to us. In those chapters, it's amazing how often Jesus says ask and you will receive, ask and it will be given to you, ask and the Father will give it to you.

I want to tell you, brothers and sisters in Christ, now is the time for us to enter into prayer and ask. Ask God to give us a faith that is able to seize on the power and gift of the Holy Spirit that God has given us, so that we can be his witness in the world, so that Saint Timothy's can be that witness here in San Jose and California and throughout the United States and the entire world, touching lives with the hope of the Gospel. This Holy Spirit that we celebrate coming on Pentecost is at work in our midst this very day, empowering us to be God's people, empowering us to trust fully in him, empowering us to give our lives over to him, so that he is glorified in our relationships, in our words, in our actions, in our love shown to the world.

Before I move more deeply into John, I want to go back to Acts and recognize that what the Holy Spirit did immediately upon entering the disciples was empower them to share the Good News of the wonderful things God has done and to share those truths across all sorts of monumental barriers – language, race, culture. The disciples, having received the Holy Spirit, were able to share in profound ways that people could understand the wonderful things of God. So as we look to the Gospel of John today and we recognize in those chapters this call to abide in the presence of God, to remain, to wait, we're reminded that that waiting is not an impatient twiddling of the thumbs. It's not like, at least my experience of covid has been, where it's like “Oh, can this please be over? Can we please get going? Can we please get out of the house? Can we please get these masks off? Can we please start hugging and touching one another again?” But rather the abiding place is a place of hope. It's a place of renewed anticipation. It's a place where we recognize afresh that the promises of God are promises *for* us, that the power of God is power *for* us to do the things that God calls us to do, that he is at work equipping his people.

So this holy space, this sanctuary, here at Saint Timothy's has been set aside to be a place where the word is proclaimed and the sacraments bring the very real presence of Christ into our hands and into our bodies and into our lives. This is an abiding place. It's a place to come and rest, not sleep, not wish we didn't have to get up on Monday morning, but rather a place where we can be restored, reinvigorated, re-strengthened through grace and forgiveness, through the renewal of relationships and the encouragement of both God's word and God's people, so that as we go out those doors, the love, the light, the joy of Christ can shine.

Now when you read these chapters in John, and when you think about the Ezekiel text, and even in the Acts story, where you hear the crowd say maybe that they're drunk, you see that the path to ministry is not an easy one. There is resistance. There is anger. There is rejection. There's hardship and struggle. There's life and death and all the things that happened in between in the reality of this broken world. John says he writes that Jesus tells us, that he gives this to his followers, to you and to me. He gives it so that we can experience his joy. Joy that abides even over the top of struggle. Joy that is rooted in faith, that can hold strong, even in the midst of difficult circumstances. Faith that can be encouraged by God's word and sacrament. Faith that can be encouraged by God's people, even as we struggle in the realities of our lives and circumstances, of our culture, and differences with people. Jesus knows of those difficult times and he tells us something in this text which is truly potent. He says the Holy Spirit when he comes will do this: convict the world of its sin and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. Now you might be saying, Pastor, you're not excited about that, like are you? Because that doesn't sound very exciting - convicting the world of sin and of God's righteousness and of coming judgment. I mean that sounds more scary than anything else, doesn't it?

So let's see what the text says, because after he gives the list, it actually says a little bit more. It says "the world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me." Now I don't know about you, but I like to think of sin as, you know, like robbery and murder and illegal drugs, and abuse and those kinds of things. I'm thinking, yeah, we need to bring those things to an end. Wouldn't it great to be in a world where those things didn't happen?

I think most of us have certain sins that bother us more than others. In this conversation, I'm not talking about *my* sins. I'm talking about *their* sins, which is something that I think we like to do occasionally, as we don't want to look inward. I wish *those* people would stop, but there are a couple of problems with that. One of the problems is we think of sin and then we think of the fix for sin is behavior modification. Okay, they used to do this. If we could stop them from doing that, then everything would be okay. It's a pretty powerful note that when the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, the sin the Holy Spirit is there to convict the world of is not believing in Jesus. Jesus is the remedy for our sin. We will never be able to so

modify our behavior that the world becomes the place God intends it to be. We will need to put our trust in Jesus, to experience forgiveness that not only allows us to move beyond our guilt and our shame, but even allows us to forgive others, so that we can move beyond being victims. That's why God sent his Son into the world, so that the world could experience new life in him.

The text goes on. It says considering righteousness because righteousness is available because Jesus goes to the Father. So often we think of righteousness as our living more rightly. That is, that there's some movement, some progression that hopefully tomorrow I will live a little more righteously than I live today and I will grow in my righteous living. But the righteousness that is spoken of here in John is a righteousness that is available because Jesus goes to the father. A righteousness that is a gift that God gives us in Jesus' righteousness, not in our own. We are as filthy rags and we deserve judgment and punishment, but instead, we're offered, we're invited to experience the righteousness of Jesus. This righteousness is a rightness with God that is given to us as a gracious and merciful gift in which we can rest, in which we can be revived and restored. You see it's when we experience that gift of righteousness from God, we recognize that he has now made me able to be his servant, his representative, his spokesperson, his ambassador in the world. Because of what Jesus has done, you and I are declared by God to be his ambassadors, his emissaries to the world, so we can take that same gift that God has given us and offer it to others. And we don't have to look for those who deserve it because no one does. We simply look for those who will receive it and we tell them in the power and goodness of God, in the love and compassion of Christ, that it's available to them, that Jesus has done it on their behalf as he's done it on our behalf. So it doesn't separate us from others. It calls us into their lives to be the hands and feet of Jesus, to bring hope to a world of dry bones, to speak a word that can bring new life, a new possibility to those who may be experiencing utter and complete despair. What an amazing thing!

Now I don't know about you, but this judgment word is a word that I don't like to hear. I don't want to think about it. I don't want to talk about it. It's uncomfortable. Yet, here in John, listen to what this says. It says that we're going to hear a word of the coming judgment, that the Holy Spirit is going to make known the coming judgment, but then it says judgment will

come because the ruler of this world has already been judged. This is talking about Satan. This is talking about the devil, the personification of evil. It is saying the enemy of God has already lost and because he's already lost, because he's already been judged, because Jesus was victorious over him through his death and in his resurrection, it's probably a good idea if you and I don't hang out with him. Let's not attach ourselves to the loser. Let's recognize that evil has been judged and so now we are free to live in the fullness of life that God intends for us. Now I recognize that that's a faith statement. I recognize that we still see things in the world that need judgment, but let's not fall back into the temptation to be purveyors of behavior modification.

Let's instead be those that are the hands and feet and mouth of Jesus, letting the world know that God so loved the world, that God so loved them that he gave his only begotten son so as they believe in him, they can experience the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life and that transforming power of God is available to them, as it is for us, this very day, to give us life, to give us hope, to give us purpose and power to live out that purpose. Bishop Selbo's word a couple of weeks ago was God will only do through the church what the church is willing to do through him. This is the birthday of the church. This is Pentecost. We, you and I, we are the church and the spirit is at work and moving in us and will move through us as we go out those doors and share the good news of God's love in Jesus. Thanks be to God. Amen.