

Order of Service for 5-23-21 (Pentecost)

Livestream Link:

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you,

C: and also with you.

P: Listen to the promise of Jesus on the night before He died:

John 15:26-27

P: “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

C: Lord, send us the Counselor!

Acts 2:1-12

P: When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and 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 Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

C: We rejoice in the coming of the Holy Spirit!

Opening Hymn: “*Holy Spirit, Ever Dwelling*” – Hymn #650

Confession and Forgiveness

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

P: In that name, and with that faith-as dear children approaching a loving parent, as sinners redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, as believers filled with the Holy Spirit- -let us confess our sins to almighty God.

C: Let us seek forgiveness. (Silence for meditation and self-examination.)

P: Most merciful God,

C: We have been unworthy and disobedient children. We have ignored our Father's admonitions, disregarded our Savior's instructions, and grieved the Holy Spirit. We are not worthy to be called children of God. But we beg You—of Your fatherly compassion, by Your saving merits, at Your inviting call--to have mercy on us and grant us Your forgiveness.

P: God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life. To those who believe in Jesus Christ, the heavenly Father gives the Holy Spirit that they may be children of God. Rejoice in the Lord; your sins are forgiven. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

Prayer of the Day

P: God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as You sent upon the disciples the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, look upon Your Church and open our hearts to the power of the Spirit. Kindle in us the fire of Your love, and strengthen our lives for service in Your kingdom; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Hymn of Praise: “Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest” – Hymn #498

Old Testament Lesson: Ezekiel 37:1-14

R: The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And He led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. And He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, You know.” Then He said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon 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 was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, 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, son of man, and say to the breath, “Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

Then He said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O My people. And I

will put My Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle Lesson: Acts 2:13-21

R: But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.” But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

““And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on My male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Holy Gospel: John 16:4b-15

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 16th chapter.

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

P: “I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you. And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see Me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that He will take what is Mine and declare it to you.

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon Hymn: “O Holy Spirit, Enter In” - Hymn #913

Sermon: “Dry Bones” - Ezekiel 37:1-14

Have you ever thought about your breath? About how you breathe? Every time we inhale, our diaphragms contract and move downwards so there is room for our lungs to expand. Air is pulled into the lungs, and oxygen gets into the blood. Carbon dioxide then fills the lungs and is forced out when we exhale. Given that the average person takes 25000 breaths a day, it's amazing we don't think about breathing that much.

Usually, if we think about breathing, it's when we're having trouble doing it. Maybe the pollen is in the air and your allergies are acting up. Maybe you've got asthma, and you wonder if you need to pull out your inhaler. Maybe it was hearing about ventilators and ECMO machines and how those afflicted with serious cases of COVID-19 needed machines to help them breathe.

But we also know that when we are mindful about our breathing, that helps us in many ways. It can help lower our pulse and blood pressure. It can calm us, help us to pause.

In the Old Testament lesson for today, God shows the prophet Ezekiel a vision that dramatically shows how important breath is. It's one of the most famous visions in the Bible. The vision begins with a valley of dry bones, but ends with them alive again, filled with the breath of God.

In order to keep your lungs healthy, you have to do certain things. You have to exercise, especially aerobic exercise. You have to keep stuff that could harm your lungs out of them, which is why smoking bans exist and why people wore masks even before the pandemic to help with allergies or as protection against air pollution. You have to make sure you don't try to breathe and eat or drink at the same time. You have to avoid letting yourself get too sick and catch pneumonia.

Spiritually, we do things that harm us too. We breathe in from the culture around us, and get filled with the wrong things. We breathe in cries for personal responsibility, but forget about loving our neighbors as ourselves. We breathe in the need for more stuff and keeping up with the Joneses, instead of being content with what we have. We breathe in opinions that agree with our preconceptions, and forget about learning and connecting with those who think differently than we do. Our calendars are filling up again after being emptied last year, but leave us feeling drained.

Israel had been breathing in the wrong things. It had kept God's breath out of their lives. Their idolatry had finally caught up with them, and they'd been taken into exile, just as the prophets had warned would happen. Their march across the desert had made them lose their breath. They couldn't see any chance of new life. All they could see was the end of their old life.

Ezekiel was forced to take a good look at the situation as God shows him this vision. It's hard to avoid the consequences of sin when walking through a valley of dry bones, of those who died because of their sin. It's hard to avoid the consequences of sin with death and destruction all around. It's hard to avoid the consequences of sin when it looks like the end.

But that wasn't the end. God spoke. God commanded Ezekiel to speak. God commanded Ezekiel to speak to over the bones, speak the word of God to them. And the bones rattled and shook and came together. They got reconnected with tendons and muscle and skin. But God wasn't done yet.

God didn't just recreate the bodies. He bought them to life. God commanded Ezekiel to speak to the wind, to the breath. Ezekiel did, and the breath entered the bodies, and there was life.

And this is where we get a brief vocabulary lesson. Spirit and breath and wind are the same word in Hebrew, ruach. And that can get confusing in some passages like this, when we can wonder or look from English translation to English translation and see if something is translated wind or breath or spirit. But it also reminds us that the spirit of God is what brings life. The Spirit of God is what makes the dry bones walk. God's word and God's spirit come together, and bring new life.

The Word and the Spirit bring life where there was only death. When Israel mourned and lamented in exile, the Spirit breathed new life into them like a wind animating a valley of dry bones. When they felt abandoned, God showed he would not leave them.

Today is Pentecost, the day we focus on the work of the Holy Spirit, who appears as wind and flames of fire. We often think that the great miracle of Pentecost is that the apostles were able to speak in different languages. But the greater miracle is that they were outside speaking where people could hear them! The same disciples who had hidden in the upper room with the doors locked for fear that those who had killed Jesus would kill them too, were now, less than two months later, speaking boldly and courageously out in public. They took deep breaths then pointed everyone to Jesus and what he had just done on the cross.

The Spirit continues to be breathed out into us. As we hear God's Word, as we gather together to praise God, the Holy Spirit is at work in us. This still takes place today when we are bone tired, out of breath and tongue-tied in our prayers. Whenever we experience emptiness, God breathes new life into our bodies and fills us with the Spirit from on high

It may look like we're looking out at a valley of dry bones as we look into the world. Church attendance was dropping before the pandemic, and the return to worship hasn't been as fast or as large as many hoped. More and more people are spiritual, but not religious. More and more people are turning away from God to follow greed and pride and lust. It looks like we can only see a valley of dry bones.

Yet we worship a God who can breathe life into dry bones. We tend to overestimate what we can do in the short term, and underestimate what God can do in the long term. Looking out over a valley of dry bones, we can think all hope is lost. But God is bigger than that.

As G.K. Chesterton said, "Christendom has had a series of revolutions and in each one of them Christianity has died. Christianity has died many times and risen again; for it had a God who knew the way out of the grave." God knows the way out of the grave. God knows how to bring life where we see only death. God knows how to bring words when we run out of words. God knows how to let us take a breath, and relax.

Breathing is a big deal, and today God calls us all to receive the breath of new life, the Holy Spirit. In God there is a breath for the weary and heavy-laden, for the crushed in spirit, for the despised and lowly. The breath he gives enters into the deepest dryness of your life and revitalizes who you are beyond all understanding. Yes, in Jesus is a breath of life that extends even beyond the grave.

Confession of Faith: Third Article of Creed p. 323

Prayer of the Church

Invitation to Holy Communion

P: The Holy Spirit, who breathed life into the dry bones that Ezekiel saw and filled the disciples on Pentecost, comes to us today in very definite ways— through God’s Word, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. We join together in the special meal of Jesus’ true body and blood trusting that through it He forgives us to our sins and the Holy Spirit breathes new life into us. We obey Jesus’ command and join in the Holy Communion.

The Words of our Lord

Lord’s Prayer

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: Amen.

Distribution

“Come Down, O Love Divine” – Hymn #501

Closing Prayer:

P: God, our Creator, earth has many languages, but Your Gospel announces Your love to all nations in one heavenly speech. Make us messengers of the good news that, through the power of Your Holy Spirit, everyone may unite in one song of praise, through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Blessing (pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: “Holy Spirit, Light Divine” – Hymn #496

Postlude

