

Pentecost, Year B
Ezekiel 37: 1-14
Acts 2: 1-21

Trinity Episcopal Church
Sonoma, California
May 31, 2009

Dry Bones on the Move:
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

In the last few months you and I have had quite a time of it. Our trust has been broken. Our money taken. The community we love betrayed. There have been times when I've felt like those dry bones—parched, brittle, ready to break. There have been times when I've wanted to huddle behind closed doors. Times when I've wanted to seal off Trinity from the impending world. Has it been that way for you as well? Have you found yourself living in that valley of dry bones?

When those times wash over me, I find myself remembering the words of a spiritual I love to sing,

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sinsick soul.
Sometimes I feel discouraged and think my work's in vain
But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.

For me that hymn is a reminder of the many ways God revives my soul. The spiritual takes me back to the times when, contrary to all outward signs, God has brought me back to life and brought life back to me. Times when life seems bleak; times when it looks like there is no way out; times when I begin to suspect God has abandoned me. And yet, paradoxically, it is precisely in such times that I feel closest to God. Not that God changes the material conditions of my life, but just that God makes life bearable. Times when God, like those rivers that run deep under the surface of the Earth, is at work bringing newness to life. God at work—slowly, almost imperceptibly but at work nonetheless.

Sometimes when I think of the Holy Spirit, I picture that rush of wind and expect to be hurled out of tough times. An active, energetic spirit moving and shaking off the stuff—the junk of life. But experience tells me that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, comes often as not in the still small voice that whispers dry bones back to life—a word of comfort here, a gesture of solidarity there, a hand of friendship extended, a corner turned, new vistas exposed.

And yet that still small voice whispering dry bones back to life is not the end of the story. You see the Holy Spirit doesn't stop with reviving sinsick souls. The life story of the Holy Spirit doesn't end in the Valley of the Dry Bones. The story keeps on going. The Holy Spirit descends like tongues of fire on frightened disciples and hurls them out into the world giving them the strength to do God's work in the world—healing the sick, feeding the hungry, proclaiming the love of God.

Remember the last stanza of that hymn? It goes like this:

If you cannot preach like Peter,
If you cannot pray like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus
And say, "He died for all."

Take a good look at Peter. No longer the frightened disciple cowering in the courtyard, no longer just a heap of dry bones huddled behind a locked door, Peter proclaims at the top of his lungs,

"In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

Peter doesn't stop there. Peter's story does not end in that square. Peter goes on— healing the lame and the blind, curing the sick, bringing the dead back to life.

Dry bones on the move.

And so it is with us. We are not a heap of dry bones huddled behind locked doors. We are a people of vision and dreams. A people called to feed the hungry in body and in spirit. A people called to proclaim the Gospel in language all people can hear and understand. That's the beauty of our Anglican tradition. We're a Pentecost people. We were founded on the notion that the Gospel should be preached and heard in the language of the people. Sometimes we do that in the words we speak and sometimes we do that in the deeds that we do for we are a Pentecost people.

Watch out world, dry bones are on the move!