

Jesse Perkins  
Friday, May 18, 2018  
Year B Pentecost Sunday

Ezekiel 37:1-14  
Acts 2:1-21  
Luke 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

“Prophecy. Prophecy to the Bones.”

- Almost 16 years ago now, when Katy and I first began our married life together
  - One month after our wedding and we adopted our first dog.
  - His name was Beans.
  - He was 9 months old when we got him, grew to be about 65 pounds, black and brown hound dog that maybe resembled a Doberman
  - He was a great dog, smart... loved to shred towels in games of tug of war
  - But when we moved to Evanston to go to seminary, we realized that a tiny two bedroom apartment was not going to work
  - We decided to ask Katy’s parents, who have a large yard in Arkansas, to keep him.
    - He loved their other dog, and was very happy there.
  - Katy and I finished our time in seminary, moved back to Arkansas
  - And about two years later, Katy’s dad abruptly and unexpectedly insisted that we take Beans back home
  - It did not take us long to figure out why- Beans could hardly stand up anymore- wasn’t eating or drinking much
  - You could see his ribs and hips- looked like a walking skeleton
  - I think Katy’s dad feared the worst, and wanted us to make those final decisions for our dog
  - So we took Beans to the vet, and the doctor told that Beans was really ok, it was that his joints hurt him so badly that he couldn’t move much
  - And all we had to do was to give him this little daily pill, which we got for \$4/month at the Walmart pharmacy
    - Meloxicam
    - And he should recover
  - So we started the daily medication... and oh my goodness! The dog rebounded
  - Began eating and drinking, his eyes cleared, his tail started wagging

- And slowly the flesh came back and covered his old skeleton so that you couldn't see the bones through his skin anymore
- Beans was still an old dog at this point, and he lived two more years before his health completely failed him
- Two more years that I feel was a gift with my first dog as an adult.
- As we watched him improve after taking that simple daily pill, it was like a slow motion re-enactment of what Ezekiel describes right here
- Dry bones, being re-covered with flesh and sinew- getting a new lease on life
- I will admit- I still get the “feelz” when I talk about good old Beans, or see a photo of him
  - And he was just a pet, right?
  - Imagine if you will what might have been going through Ezekiel's mind and heart as God showed him the valley of dry bones
  - Because these were not just any bones- these were the bones of his recent ancestors
  - A mass grave where most likely Babylon had slaughtered the Israelite army and scattered the remaining people into exile<sup>1</sup>
  - This is when their land and kingdom was lost, and where their cultural identity was laid to its final resting place
  - It was both metaphorical, and literal- a place of death
  - And God commanded the prophet to Prophecy. Prophecy to the bones.
  - Tell them that there is hope to live again- tell them that God is going to put the breath back into them
  - The Hebrew word there for breath, *ruach*, is a feminine noun for breath, wind, and also for The Spirit <sup>2 3</sup>
  - It should remind you of God creating the world and humankind back in Genesis
  - And it should remind you of that Acts reading we will get to in a moment
  - This is also a pretty good example of the definition of a prophecy
  - Prophecies are not predictions of the future
  - They are God's truth in the present about God's hope for the future.
  - God asks the prophet- can these bones live?
  - Only you know, God- and yes they can.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.montreal.anglican.org/comments/archive/bpentm.shtml>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.montreal.anglican.org/comments/archive/bpentm.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/7307.htm>

- Prophecy to the Bones. Prophecy hope.
- Speak to the truth that God's breath can undo the violence of war, she can mend broken pieces
- She can overcome death.
- While Ezekiel was only concerned with the nation of Israel, when God began to fulfill the promise to Israel it was much bigger than originally thought
  - No longer to just the small nation-state of Israel, no longer was God's people just one group of ethnically similar people
  - This breath, this Spirit, came to the disciples while they in a room together, likely in prayer, in waiting, as Jesus had told them to do
  - Unaware of really anything else going on outside in the street
  - Our reading from Acts says that divided tongues of fire appeared and rested on each of them
  - What do you think that would have looked like??? I have no idea
  - I do know that the hat a bishop wears, a miter, is supposed to look like a tongue of fire on his or her head <sup>4</sup>
  - Just a few months back I saw a statue at the Art Institute of Buddha, who had a flame of fire on his head
  - No kidding- I made a mental note right then to mention it to you today
  - Best guess is that it symbolized wisdom and enlightenment <sup>5</sup>
  - I like to think of it as a light bulb appearing over their heads in a moment of inspiration, as they finally figured it out, that they got it.
  - They knew what they were supposed to do
  - And they knew that nothing, not even their own lives, was more important than this new mission God was sending them on
  - And a violent rushing wind came through the room, and I like to think it blew them out the door and into the streets where they were supposed to be.
  - Because good news this big should not- cannot- be kept to ones self.
  - The Holy Spirit had come and it had brought them a new mission, one very similar to Ezekiel
  - Their new mission: Prophecy. Prophecy to the bones that you see around you.
  - And they spoke to the people they met, and they discovered they had been given the gift of tongues
  - They found their tongues! Their voices! Their courage.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.epicenter.org/episcopal-vestments/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/21023>

- And when they spoke to strangers from different lands, they were understood as if they were speaking fluently in that person's native language
- The cultural and linguistic divides were smashed by the Holy Spirit's straight line winds
- No more boundaries, no more excuses, no more legitimate reason to see another human being as the "other".
- God says to Prophecy. Prophecy to the bones.
  - Speak the good news in a way that helps the very flesh come back onto the bones of hopelessness and despair
  - Speak in a way that honors the image of God in every single human being
  - Right here, right in this moment, the Holy Spirit broke through those cultural divides that separated these strangers
  - Here, people from 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
  - I am convinced that the Holy Spirit wants to do the same thing with us today- to break down the divisions that separate
  - To help us connect, speak, hear and understand all of God's children
  - Today we might say: people from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Haiti and Cuba
    - Guatemala, India, Iraq and Korea, Israel and Palestine
  - All can hear of God's amazing deeds of power and of love, and each of these peoples are of value to God, none more than the rest
  - Goodness, we need another Pentecost.
  - We need to be enlightened, and then thrown out of our rooms to go prophesy hope and love this world
  - To speak words and breathe God's breath to every single human being out there
  - To live and breath and speak in ways that puts the flesh back on the bones of hopelessness, violence, and death.
  - I think back to my dog Beans- I think back to his return from the brink of death, I remember his tail wagging
  - We should live and breath, we should love,
    - We should prophesy, in a way that would make people's tails wag if they had one
- It is a big calling, and big mission that God called this new church to on that first Pentecost
  - And that God calls us as the church today do right here and now.

- Now you and I right here cannot change the entire world at once, but we can make a difference
- Little by little- Pentecost gives us our marching orders <sup>6</sup>
- This is why I have for many years now released lady bugs into the church gardens at the conclusion of Pentecost Sunday
- It reflects my hope that as we are “ground zero” for 4500 lady bugs released, we will also be “ground zero” for what Pentecost represents.
- Not only are they Pentecost red
- They bravely crawl out into the unknown and begin working to change a garden for the better
- They are capable of eating 50-60 aphids in one day, keeping those harmful insects from hurting your plants
- Did you know that ladybugs have even traveled to outer-space?
- They were on board a NASA shuttle in 1999 as a part of Eileen Collins’ experiments
- They were able to survive even in microgravity settings
- Resilient, adaptable, and a force for good
- They may not be a traditional symbol, but that sums up Pentecost pretty well
- It sums up what we are supposed to be about, what we promise at Baptism and Confirmation
- And the promise we renew every time someone else gets Baptized or Confirmed.
- To love God, to love each other, to respect the dignity of every human being.
- Let us go out like that, in our small little corner of God’s creation, and prophesy.
- Speak and breathe hope and new life
- Blow out the fires of fear mongering, dehumanization, and of the threats of violence
- Kindle the flame of love, forgiveness, equality and justice
- Tell the Good News of God’s love in the resurrected Christ.
- Our world needs it just as much as the ancient world did under the Roman Empire
- Prophecy. Prophecy to the Bones.

Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> PulpitFiction, <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/pentecostb>, 2018