

Nothing Short of the Breath of God

The Day of Pentecost

June 4, In the Year of Our LORD, 2006

Gates Presbyterian Church

The Rev. Ralph S. English, Pastor

Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Acts 2:1-21

Although the major part of our roof work commences after the Yard Sale, tomorrow, weather permitting, a powerful vacuum will suck up all the stones that protected the roof from the weather.

2600 years ago, during a 50 year exile in Babylon (modern Iraq), the Jews felt as though all that was important to them was vacuumed from their lives. They were far away from their beloved homeland and the temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel reminded them of their wrongdoing for which God punished them, but he also gave them hope. The haunting words of Ezekiel 37 tell us the people claimed: “our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are completely cut off.” Ezekiel’s vision of a valley of dry bones, a metaphor for how the people felt, takes a 180 degree. Nothing short of the breath of God blows on them, the bones come back together, muscles and skin are added, and the multitude lives again.

Just over 2000 years ago, the disciples of Jesus, in those ten days of “exile” between Jesus’ ascension and the Day of Pentecost, felt as though all that was vital and important to them had been vacuumed from their lives. Jesus was no longer with them. They felt powerless, “dried up,” their “hope lost,” and “completely cut off.” On that tremendous Day of Pentecost, nothing short of the breath of God, the winds of the Spirit moved through them and their whole demeanor took a 180 degree turn. The church is born, and the disciples no longer felt as though their lives were vacuous. No longer did they feel empty, cut off, dried up. They had the energy, the vim, the vigor, to move on!

Today, on the Day of Pentecost, there are people of the world who feel the emptiness of the Jews in exile and the Disciples before the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps that emptiness, that feeling of being dried up, without hope and cut off from all that is good is fed by concern for those who know homelessness, famine, civil strife, war, hostile action of military forces seeking to bring peace – and perhaps the vacuous nature of our lives is fed because we look in all the wrong places for something to fill our lives.

Tens of millions of people watched the crowning of a new “American Idol,” and while most know it is entertainment, does no one raise an eyebrow over the word “idol?” Ought we not to squirm - that perhaps the hoopla over this plays “footsy” with the commandment “you shall not worship or bow down to any idol?”

One of the latest of crazes is over the movie “The DaVinci Code.” Yes, the movie’s release might get more people to read the gospels – but, what part of *fiction* do people not get? Perhaps some people think Jesus and Mary Magdalene are taboo subjects for complicated and convoluted stories, - but it is FICTION!

What is *not* fiction is the faith of these nine confirmands. From the very first day of class, they proved they had not been nurtured in a vacuum. They were not dried up, cut off. While today is about them, it is also about us, their church and their families in whose loving embrace and nurturing presence they came to know the bible stories, they came to terms with what they believe – and why they believe it. Today we feel nothing short of the breath of God!

2600 years ago, it was Ezekiel's task to tell God's people they didn't need Jerusalem to have faith, that it dwelt in the inner reaches of their souls. 2000 years ago, it was the Holy Spirit that filled the disciples and those who gathered on Pentecost with the power and the faith that dwelt in the inner reaches of their souls. Today, it is The Rev. Strawbridge and I who remind these nine – and all of you in whose midst they were nurtured that what is fact, what is powerful, what is true and what is loving, gracious, peace and hope filled dwells in your hearts, in your minds, and in your souls – and with the power of the Holy Spirit in the innermost reaches of our being, what is dry and dead is enlivened, what is worrisome finds its solace in God, and what is vacuous, empty, and devoid of all that is good finds its hope in God.

Praise be to God – Creator, Redeemer and Empower!

Amen.