

Romans 8:22-27      Dry Bones  
Acts 2:1-21  
May 23, 2021

The image of Dry Bones comes from a scene in the 37th chapter of the Book of Ezekiel. More than any other Hebrew prophet, Ezekiel is associated with the dark times of the Babylonian Exile, the time after both of Israel's kingdoms had been conquered.

One can imagine what the image of a Valley of Dry Bones meant to them. Life was a desert, there were skeletons all around. Imagine, a desert full of skeletons *coming to life*.

Today is Pentecost. It represents for the Christian faith the coming of the Holy Spirit. It was at the celebration of Pentecost, the harvest festival of the winter wheat, fifty days after Passover, that the Holy Spirit came and enlivened the community of believers to begin to speak the gospel.

The idea of spirit means "breath, wind," the source of whatever it is that brings us to life and makes us living, breathing beings. To the ancients it had a mysterious quality. Even with all the scientific explanations to help us, it retains its mystery even now. It blows where it wants. It becomes still on a whim.

The Spirit, however, is more than a physical thing. It stands for the even more mysterious quality of life that runs beyond anything material. The best window into

the understanding of what the spiritual life represents is the context of relationships.

In this context we learn about realities that are not physical at all; hatred and anger, selfishness and greed, fear and anxiety, all on one hand. And on the other; friendship and love, compassion and empathy, goodness and mercy, to name a few. As literal air fills our bodies to make them alive, the spirit fills our souls, giving *life* to life.

It is also Youth Sunday. Last Sunday I invited you to come to this service with a youthful heart. Try to remember what being young is like. For those of you who are young, take a moment to reflect on its meaning.

One of the truths about being young is that one's physical capabilities are reaching their zenith. Enjoy. The long slow decline is closer than one might think. Today I speak to the young person in all of us that never really goes away even when the strength begins to fade.

And we have heard not only the account in the Book of Acts of the Spirit's dramatic arrival, but also one of the most significant passages in all the writings of St. Paul, as he talks about life as groaning like in the pains of childbirth, life as waiting eagerly for adoption, about not really knowing what we ought to pray for, and about how the Spirit helps us, searching our hearts when we can find no words, interceding on our behalf. Ushering us into the realm of the divine.

With all this in mind we consider the journey from youth to maturity. When we have no maturity, life is a chaos that bounces from one thing to another, one excess to another, with little connection to anything or sense of order or meaning.

Without a childlike youthfulness life is listless and boring, uninspiring, dry. Part of what the spiritual life is about is moving from the one to the other in a healthy way, without losing the youthful heart, it I may put it that way, or failing to attain the greater sense of life's meaning that is associated with experience and wisdom.

Are there suggestions for the journey, things we might tell our young selves and by telling our young selves remind our older selves too, who are yet on the journey? I offer three.

The first is to be grounded in reality. I mean by this, live one's life in the context of the time and place and circumstances you have been given. We live in the modern period, characterized by industry and technology and science; we live in the time after the big wars of the 20th century, the age of nuclear weapons, global transportation and trade, pandemics, computers and information technology.

There are many ways to approach life in the world. One can embrace it uncritically, as if it is all good, refusing to see its shortcomings and to be unaware of its dire problems. One can reject it all, move to the wilderness somewhere, and live off the land. In-

between, where most of us reside, lies all kinds of partial acceptances and rejections, affirmations and condemnations. Make your place in *this* world because it is the real one.

This requires humility. From the start, no matter if you are the best and brightest of your generation, acknowledge that you have little control over anything, even of your own life. Don't be too sure of your knowledge, be open-minded, always listen, never assume your way is best. None of us gave life to the valley with the skeletons in it nor with tongues of fire enlivened the believers with spiritual vitality.

Have faith. Even when we find ourselves in unsettlingly mysterious situations of pain, confusion and powerlessness, never forget that all this religiosity or lack of it is not relevant. Faith is relevant. Trust.

Trust in the one who made the bones come to life and made the believers speak like they were drunk early in the day; the one who inhabits space, time and eternity, as well as every tiny thing, making it all breath in and out and filling it up with whatever it is that takes us beyond the machine-like working of our bodies to the glorious abundance of life in relationship; to the physical world of which we are apart, to the other beings with whom we share it (this makes it really interesting) and to the source of life, creator, redeemer, sustainer of life and faith, revealed in Jesus Christ.

And pay attention, the bones begin to stir, the tongues of fire flame up, giving life to life.

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