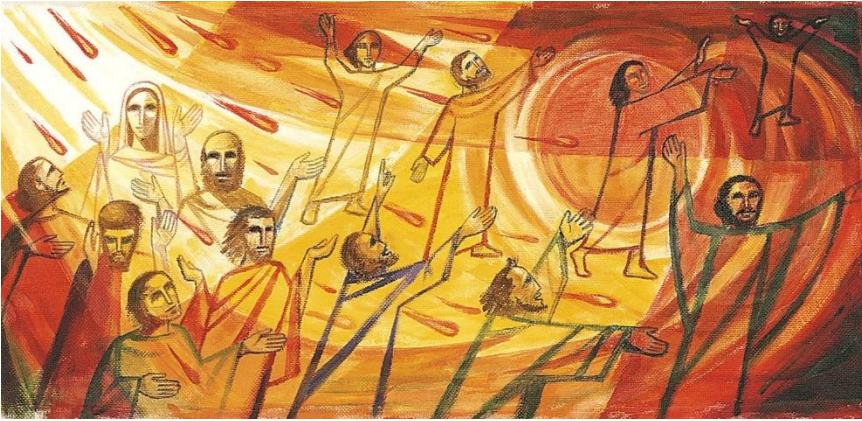


Pentecost 2021

The Coming of the Spirit: Bones, Breath and Speech. Ezekiel 37.1-14 Romans 8.22-27 John 15.26-27;16.4b-15



Holy Spirit, sent by the Father,
ignite in us your holy fire;
strengthen your children with the
gift of faith,
revive your Church with the
breath of love,
and renew the face of the earth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bones

Have ever used the phrase 'chilled to the bone'? The exaggeration in the imagery means that we take the phrase as both a fact and an emotional state.

The "valley of dry bones" is almost certainly the most well known of the prophet Ezekiel's visions. And the story becomes even more powerful when we learn something of its background. In 597 BCE the armies of Babylon captured the city of Jerusalem and deported the king and those who held power. In 587 BCE Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple and deported a second wave of intellectuals. The young Ezekiel was deported in the first wave, forced to live in Babylon. People were concerned. Jerusalem, the Temple, the Davidic King had been destroyed. Was God really faithful?

Just as we use the phrase 'chilled to the bone' to describe feeling cold outside and numb or fearful inside, the Psalms describe the emotional grief of the tribe – my bones are shaking with terror, my bones burn like a furnace, my bones are dried up, our very selves are desolate. (Psalms 31, 102, 137). These communal cries of lament, from the heart of the people, from the bones of the people feed into Ezekiel's vision. Ezekiel speaks into the factual and emotional state of the nation. Into their sense of hopelessness and helplessness he shows them a vision of exactly what they are encountering- a valley of dry bones. Into it he speaks a prophetic message of deliverance summarized in verses 12-14 : "I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil." God's Spirit of breath will reach out and bring people back.

Breath

There is a real play on words in Ezekiel. " I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live" (v. 14). God's Spirit will enable the exiles to return; God's Spirit gave Ezekiel the vision; God's Spirit brings life. Can these bones live? Yes- through God's Spirit breath. The repetition of the word Spirit reminds the readers and us that God's Spirit is key; without it, things are impossible. With God's Spirit there is life.

Speech

John's Jesus tells his disciples that he will send the Spirit to guide them into the truth and to speak the truth as witnesses. The Spirit acts as an advocate, like someone before a judge speaking and bearing witness to who Jesus is in his life, death and Resurrection. The Spirit will help us also - to speak out about Jesus. *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.* And if we read on further we discover that there is no place on earth, no when in time, and no sin or situation, that can keep God's Spirit away from God's people (see Romans 8:31-38).

How does the Spirit bring life to you?

Which parts of the world and community can you pray for God's life , speak God's life and show God's life?

How do you use your breath and speech to be advocates for others?

HYMN REFLECTION FOR PENTECOST Malcolm Sturgess

Come down, O Love Divine was written by Bianco di Siena late in the 14th century. He was not born in Siena, but went there to work as a wool carder. Ultimately he wrote 122 poems, totalling 20,000 lines. 92 of the poems were in one book called *Laudi Spirituali del Bianco di Siena*. 450 years later The Rev. Richard Frederick Littledale translated four of them into English. He lived a strange life: by the age of 28, after two incumbencies, his health was so poor that all he could do was write (with what authority?) and hear confessions, which he did for thirty more years.

The hymn appeared in various hymnals, but found little favour until Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote the tune *Down Ampney* for the English Hymnal in 1906. Then it took off. [Please read the rest of this Reflection with an open mind]. *Down Ampney* is popular because it is so easy to get it right - but I do not think it is a suitable tune for the words. It is far too rigid to represent the Holy Spirit. "Lowliness of heart.. which weeps over its own shortcomings"; yearning for things which are beyond our understanding; these are not topics for a march. The simple tune tends to predominate over the complicated words.

There is a much better tune called *North Petherton* by Sir William Harris KCVO. The Royal Victorian Order is in the gift of the Sovereign for personal services. Harris directed the music at both King George VI's and our present Queen's Coronations, and was music teacher to the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret. In an appreciation of his composing style, Daniel Cook says it "tends towards gentle introspection", which is surely what is needed here. Listen for yourselves: there is a very nice recording from Norwich Cathedral, also with Salisbury connections. It is conducted by Julian Thomas, former Salisbury choirboy, whose father still lives in Harnwood Road.

Come down, O Love divine,
seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardour glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

O let it freely burn,
till earthly passions turn
to dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
and let thy glorious light
shine ever on my sight,
and clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

Let holy charity
mine outward vesture be,
and lowliness become mine inner clothing;
true lowliness of heart,
which takes the humbler part,
and o'er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.

And so the yearning strong
with which the soul will long,
shall far outpass the power of human telling:
for none can guess its grace,
till he become the place
wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.

For an overview of the Holy Spirit
in 7 minutes, you can watch

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNNZO9i1Gjc>



For an overview of Ezekiel's
visions of hope, see

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDeCWW_Bnyw