

SERMON for Sunday, June 4, 2006  
 Ezekiel 37:1-14, Acts 2:1-21  
 John 15:26-27, 16:4-15

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### Rejuvenescence

There is a spa in Madison named *Rejuvenation*, and the name has always intrigued me. At the end of a long day, when my feet are tired, and my eyelids are droopy, rejuvenation sounds like a good thing to try. When my spirits are sagging, as well as my muscles and other parts of my body, rejuvenation sounds like a good thing to try. Feel younger! Relax! Refresh! Renew! And as appealing as renewal sounds for our physical selves, so the promise of the Holy Spirit sounds appealing for our souls. We are often weary in our faith, weary of working for justice and peace in a world that doesn't seem eager to hear the message, weary sometimes of praying for health and healing in a world where disease is rampant and a new one is always on the horizon, weary too of the church as an organization that moves too slowly and sometimes in a far different direction than we would take, weary of trying to encourage others through the bumpy places of life. We need the rejuvenation spa of faith, all right. Hallelujah! Amen! But where do we find it?

This is the Sunday we in the church call Pentecost, and it is filled with a tangle of Scripture story, of symbols, of colors, of action, of people. Perhaps we can untangle some of the pieces in the next few minutes. What is this Spirit? How does it show up? What does it do? How does it matter to us?

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*the Church. The confusion of languages that was the result of human rebellion and pride at the tower of Babel is now overcome by the unifying power of the Holy Spirit. After Pentecost, the followers of Jesus were empowered to continue the ministry of Jesus and to proclaim the Gospel message. And thus the story of the first Christian understanding of Pentecost.*

What an exciting time it must have been, albeit new and perhaps even dangerous in that political and religious climate, to be a follower of Jesus. And what an intensity of purpose must have stirred up among the disciples, to be bearers of not only good news but new news of Jesus to those who had not yet heard. But now, for us, is not then. And we, in a time when Christianity is more established even though sometimes wildly misunderstood, are not in the forefront of a startling cosmic discovery. So when do we see the Spirit? It was poet Christina Rossetti who penned,

*Who has seen the wind? Neither I nor you:  
But when the leaves hang trembling  
The wind is passing thro'.  
Who has seen the wind? Neither you nor I:  
But when the trees bow down their heads  
The wind is passing by.*

So it is with the Spirit. We cannot see the Holy Spirit itself, and for most of us that is a source of discomfort and unease. Where is the Spirit? Like the leaves and the trees who bow before the wind, so we can see God's presence in more ways than we can imagine, just as those on that day in Jerusalem experienced God with such power and glory beyond their imagination.

We see the Spirit when we see the embodiment of hope. Yesterday was Madison's *Race for the Cure*, a huge event around the concerns of breast cancer. Walkers and runners came in memory of those who have died of the disease, survivors proudly wore pink shirts and hats, supporters came by the thousands. More than twenty members of Lake Edge took part, in teams of loving support. For many, I dare say most, it was an emotional and yes, even religious experience, for the outpouring of encouragement and care, the demonstration of courage and hope. What hope we have here, in this place, with brothers and sisters in Christ. Whenever we proclaim that hope together, in teams of walkers, in the proclamation of the *sure and certain hope of the Resurrection* while we bury the dead, in the prayers for healing, in the baptism of our children, in the fellowship of the table and the peace that we pass on to one another, we have a Pentecost, and the wind of the Spirit blows.

We encounter the Spirit in the voices we hear. Oh no, I can hear you think, now she's claiming to hear voices! Well, yes, in a way. So often I read something from history, that I may even have read before, but read it in a new way and hear something new, appropriate for today. John Winthrop, an Englishman and Puritan, came to this country in the year 1630, coming across the sea with four hundred of his countrymen to form the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and serving as its first governor. The Puritans sought to escape the highly politicized church/state establishment in England, and establish a society where God could be worshipped freely and without government intervention. While on the ship, the *Arbella*, in 1630, Winthrop wrote in his diary a vision of community life: *Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one [man]. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all*

*meekness, gentleness, patience, and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others' conditions our own; rejoice together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.* When we hear clamor of so many voices claiming opposing visions of what is right for our communities and nations, we might hear the Spirit in places and from people we have long forgotten.

There are new religious voices as well, who offer refreshing insight and ask penetrating questions of how we, as churches and pastors and people of faith, are living out the mandate of God and the new commandment of Jesus to love one another. One of these voices is Brian McLaren, and he writes in his book *A Generous Orthodoxy*, of the possibilities of how Christianity can be relevant in an age of both doubt as well as an age of excruciating polarization. He writes, *...what we need is not new sectarian terminology or new jargon or a new elitist clique, but rather a humble rediscovery of the simple, mysterious way of Jesus that can be embraced across the whole Christian horizon (and beyond). What we need is something lived, not just talked or written about. The last thing we need is a new group of proud, super protestant, hyper puritan, ultra restorationist reformers who say, "Only we've got it right!" and thereby damn everybody else to the bin of five minutes ago and the bucket of below-average mediocrity.* As we hear the clashing voices of dissent about the proposed constitutional marriage amendment here in Wisconsin, as we listen to debates about immigration and continuing mideast military involvement, as we are urged to give our support to a variety of causes, our heads spin, and we are often almost paralyzed, wanting to hide in our own private sanctuaries of home and even church. In these new voices, we might hear the Spirit calling us in new ways.

*The foot bone connected to the leg bone, the leg bone connected to the knee bone...now hear the word of the Lord...dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones...How many of you had that folk song going through your head during the reading of the passage from the book of the prophet Ezekiel, about the valley of the dry bones? O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.* And so Ezekiel prophesied, and detailed the results, *...suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them.* From all outside appearances, the elements for life were present, and the body looked like it should – a structure to hold it up, interior strength, a bit of necessary padding and something to hold it all together, but the body was still missing something - life-giving breath, and they were unable to act, unable to speak, unable to hope. But whenever the body of God's people becomes filled with the Spirit, the body can live again.

We are at our own Pentecost time, or at least another Pentecost time, here at Lake Edge. We have much to celebrate and much for which to thank God. We have a Ministry Evaluation Task Force, a dry name for an energized group, which has taken on the job of looking at our mission and goals and our vision, engaging in dialogue and serious conversation with all of us about how we are living out our commitment to ministry, and what resources and personnel we need. We have the bones here - a good structure of organization and a beautifully remodeled facility for our home. We have the muscles here – people willing to confess their faith in the risen Christ and proclaim their faith and live as Christ's servant people in mission. We have the flesh and the skin – teachers for our children, musicians for our praise, resources of books and finance and support staff and technology, ideas and programs, Vacation Bible Camp and youth work trip, places to serve in the community. It is the breath of the Spirit that will fill us this day and into the future, giving us strength for the journey

ahead, giving us hope for the future, and setting our hearts aflame with zeal and passion for the gospel. It is the breath of the Spirit that will renew our vigor, and we will see a holy rejuvenescence. Amen.

Who has seen the wind? Neither you nor I but when the trees bow down their heads, the wind is passing by.