

Pentecost, 2009

May 31, 2009

Acts 2: 1-21; Ezekiel 37: 1-17

Title: Get With The Program

Let us pray: Spirit, blow, shake up, move, rush upon, guide, enlighten, gather, extend, do not delay.

A swingset. A sliding board. A sandbox. The Holy Spirit of God.

The swing—hanging securely on strong chains suspended from thick metal tubing. The four corners of the swingset are anchored in concrete. This is the kind of swing that when you pump with all your might and rise up like one of those pirate ships at the amusement park, the swing doesn't come out of the ground. This is a substantial swing in which a little child looks little and a big adult is able to give it all you got. This kind of swing requires two hands. You don't dare swing here holding only one side of the swing. Want to swing here, you'd better hold on with all you've got. Hold on. Hold on with both hands.

Frankly, two handed swinging should be required for the life of faith. It's been said we live in a one handed world where we multi-task. One hand on the steering wheel; one hand on the cell phone. One hand on the shopping cart; one hand grabbing the next product. One hand on the remote control; one hand on the magazine. One hand on the waving quickly to the neighbor; one hand surfing satellite radio. You get the picture. You don't have to fully attend to any one thing.

God intends life to be a two handed experience. Like carrying a baby, like getting to know a friend. It requires your all. You'd better hold on.

So it is with God, a two handed encounter. You better hold on. Just ask Ezekiel. Led to a valley of silence—death reigns there—it's the ultimate one handed experience. Bones everywhere; dry bones. Nothing alive. Hip bones, ribs scattered, skulls everywhere, unmoved feet, fingers and hands limp, immobile. What Ezekiel learns is that this valley is the whole people of Israel.....an open grave. They aren't alive—they are in

exile, far, far from home. Punished for their one handed life of disobedience. They had not gotten with the program—the two fisted swing.

Mortal, the Lord says to Ezekiel, Can these bones live? What does Ezekiel say? “O LORD GOD, YOU KNOW!” Does he say this like a great opera singer. He’s admitting that he can’t know. He’s holding on for dear life. O LORD GOD, YOU KNOW!” Which is a way of saying Watch out! This is the Lord talking here. The one asking the question already knows the answer.

So Ezekiel is obedient. He holds on. He speaks to the bones—Hear the word of the Lord—sinews, flesh, skin, and breathe, yes breathe, and they get up....and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. Cause God approaches us with both hands—wanting to give us life; wanting to enjoy life with us; wanting us to know that he is serious, serious about raising the dead.

When we were baptized into Christ we were called to hold on with both hands, given the ride of our life. Jesus death and resurrection—joined to us. What are we to do with this gift? This immense life long gift?

Instruments of life!! Because whatever dryness threatens, whatever valley of bones you may know, it’s no match for the Holy Spirit of God.

The future in the hands of God is brimming.

A Sliding Board. Big, shiny aluminum. Ridges on the sides to keep you from falling off. A nice sandy, soft surface at the bottom to ease the impact of coming to the ground. There they are 10, 12 steps up to the top, easily 15 feet off the ground at the top. Sit down there and push off.

Do you hold on? No way. You let go. You lift your hands and let the ride take you swiftly down to the ground, and you run around to do it again. You may even go head first this time. Putting your whole self in. Which ever way you go, you don’t want to hold on; This time holding on, holds you back. It’s something you can’t control and you learn to love it, to be guided by the slide. Let go and let God!

Ezekiel let's go and let's God. Get a load of this—8 chapters in Ezekiel, from Chapters 40 to 48, there you get a description of the new temple back in Jerusalem. Oh, it's not there. It's in rubble back there in Jerusalem destroyed by the Babylonians. Here is a blueprint for tomorrow. Listen in to chapter 40:

The north gate into the Temple—84 feet high; 42 feet wide. Leading into a courtyard; across the courtyard, a gate into an inner courtyard—168 feet between these gates. And on these gates—palm trees carved from wood and winged creatures hovering over the doorways. The inner wall of the temple was 10 feet thick.

You realize no contract has been let for the building of this temple; no bonds have been sold; no construction workers have been hired to begin construction. This is a blue print; that's all. God doesn't simply call people to life—he calls them to build life. That's what the spirit does. Jesus calls this spirit the advocate, the helper. God-sized presence in us, given to us, aflame in us, so we can let go.

But it was just a blueprint, the cynics might say.

We built this sanctuary in 2001 to hold 450 worshippers. We even have this place structurally ready to add a balcony of 75 seats. 525 seats. Plenty of room here for more people. Room for the Parthians, the Arabs, the Cretans, the Wakefieldites, the Leesvilleites, the Sandersonites, the Six Forksites, the Glenwoodites, the neighbor of yours who is waiting to be invited to church.

A blueprint—do you hear the spirit calling—

- Reintroduce our church to our neighbors.
- Become a community where we raise up more Vicar Shawns—host interns annually
- become a first fruits giving community—generous people
- develop our spiritual muscles with faith practices

- become Biblically fluent—move deeper into the Word
- develop Christ care; develop a retreat ministry
- hire a mission minister

What was all that? Statements from our 5 year strategic plan—just a blue print. We have it on good evidence, Ezekiel, that good blueprints show the imprint of our Lord—the Advocate—always inviting us to let go, to release our grip, and go where he takes us.as though life in the power of the spirit is riding on a long, life-long sliding board.

A sand box. Sand boxes are resting places. Where you are free to try on many things. Approached with bare feet. The sand covers over your feet. With a bucket you can take the sand and make it into a castle. And then just as quickly you can turn it into a huge hourglass. Spell your name in the sand, build a whole city, use a bulldozer and build a mountain. That sand takes most any shape; and then another and another. Come back another day and do something else.

With others in the sandbox we are schooled in sharing and welcoming. It's a two handed kind of place. We should spend more time there. It's not always predictable, not always the same, not always settled grace space. God wants us to take our place there. Where we can always come back and be welcomed and given plenty to do and time to enjoy, to enjoy, to live and grow and emerge, and sense his hand upon us. Sandbox Christians.

It's Pentecost. The Spirit Given. The promise of life, the helper, the advocate. Can these bones live? O LORD GOD, YOU KNOW. Divided tongues as of fire appeared among them. Filled with the spirit began to speak in other languages.

Hold on. Let go. Come sit for awhile

This is the Lord of life given to us. What will we do with this gift?

What will this gift do through us? Amen

