



SPIRIT OF GOD BREATHE IN ME

May 23, 2021
Pentecost Sunday

Twin Towers United Methodist Church
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WORSHIP GUIDE

Before you begin your time of worship, find a comfortable place to be and gather whatever you might need: your Bible, candles, something to write on and with, your computer/connected device (if you intend to listen to music online), etc. Feel free to adapt this worship guide in any way that makes best sense to you and those you might be gathered with. (Consider inviting someone – a friend, a family member – to worship with you.) Commit to spending the next hour with God.

PRELUDE - Listen and sing along to a song or hymn that blesses and centers your spirit!

WELCOME –

When Pentecost Day arrived,
they were all together in one place.
Suddenly a sound from heaven
like the howling of a fierce wind
filled the entire house where they were sitting.
They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire
alighting on each one of them.

**They were all filled with the Holy Spirit
and began to speak in other languages
as the Spirit enabled them to speak.**

Come, Holy Spirit, come!
Come, Holy Spirit, come!

OPENING PRAYER - UMH 335

O God, the Holy Spirit,
Come to us, and among us;
Come as the wind, and cleanse us;
Come as the fire, and burn;
Come as the dew, and refresh;
Convict, convert, and consecrate
Many hearts and lives
To our great good
And to thy greater glory;
And this we ask for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen

OPENING HYMN - Veni Sancte Spiritus, TFWS 2118

Listen here: <https://youtu.be/us-v4slsUX4>

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Holy Spirit, come to us.

SCRIPTURE - Ezekiel 37:1-14 / CEB

Some time later, I felt the Lord's power take control of me, and his Spirit carried me to a valley full of bones. ² The Lord showed me all around, and everywhere I looked I saw bones that were dried out. ³ He said, "Ezekiel, son of man, can these bones come back to life?" I replied, "Lord God, only you can answer that."

⁴ He then told me to say: Dry bones, listen to what the Lord is saying to you, ⁵ "I, the Lord God, will put breath in you, and once again you will live. ⁶ I will wrap you with muscles and skin and breathe life into you. Then you will know that I am the Lord."

⁷ I did what the Lord said, but before I finished speaking, I heard a rattling noise. The bones were coming together! ⁸ I saw muscles and skin cover the bones, but they had no life in them.

⁹ The Lord said: Ezekiel, now say to the wind, "The Lord God commands you to blow from every direction and to breathe life into these dead bodies, so they can live again."

¹⁰ As soon as I said this, the wind blew among the bodies, and they came back to life! They all stood up, and there were enough to make a large army.

¹¹ The Lord said: Ezekiel, the people of Israel are like dead bones. They complain that they are dried up and that they have no hope for the future. ¹² So tell them, "I, the Lord God, promise to open your graves and set you free. I will bring you back to Israel, ¹³ and when that happens, you will realize that I am the Lord. ¹⁴ My Spirit will give you breath, and you will live again. I will bring you home, and you will know that I have kept my promise. I, the Lord, have spoken."

This is the Word of God for the People of God. **Thanks be to God!**

LISTEN -

What a scene!

Ezekiel, a prophet called by God to speak judgement and comfort to God's people, is transported from exile in Babylon to an unspecified valley. This is not the first vision of Ezekiel, but his third. When his feet touch the ground, he finds himself surrounded everywhere by bones. Dry bones. Very dry bones. Meaning, those bones had been there for some time, had had all their flesh picked off by animals and birds, had come apart one from the other, and had been baked, dried,

and withered by the sun. For there to be that many bones it would seem that Ezekiel was likely standing on the scene of a former battlefield where those slain had never been properly buried. Everywhere Ezekiel looked: dry bones.

Into this disturbing and surely disconcerting scene, God asks Ezekiel a puzzling question: “Mortal, can these bones live?”

Can these bones live?! Who in their right mind, surrounded by such signs of death, would answer anything but a resounding, “No!” It is precisely because we are mortals that we know death is the final answer.

Ezekiel responds wisely though, doesn't he? He might be mortal but God is God and so he says, “O Lord God, you know.” We could read this as Ezekiel evading God's question, but it could also be an answer of utter faith and trust, couldn't it? For surely, we believe that God does know, that God is almighty and powerful, and that God can make the impossible possible. Furthermore, we believe that God is a God of life, and can and does bring life even from dust, even from death, even from dry bones.

And so maybe we needn't be surprised at what happens next, one of the strangest, most fantastical scenes in the whole Bible: at God's command, at God's word - as the old spiritual goes - the valley is filled with noise, with sound, with rattling as bone connects to bone, and sinews, we are told, become attached, and then muscles or flesh fill out each frame, and finally, skin gets pulled on. (I confess, I was transported to a scene from the Game of Thrones as I read this!)

But there was no breath in them! The bodies come back together, every part of them, but there is no breath, and without breath, there is still no life. The word breath in Hebrew, ruach, is a special, special word. It is translated as breath, as wind, and as the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit of God. It first appears in the 2nd verse of the Bible: the ruach swept over all that was yet formless and chaotic. In these 14 verses from Ezekiel alone, it appears 10 times! That's significant. We are reminded that it is the breath of God, the Holy Spirit, that gives us life.

And so Ezekiel is commanded to prophesy again and this time - just like in the Pentecost story from Acts - a mighty wind coming from all four directions, and those bodies, those shells of bodies become filled. “The breath - the Spirit - came into them, and they lived.” (Ez 37:10). This is echoed just a few verses later when God dictates a message to the house of Israel, “I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live.” (Ez 37:14).

An influential preacher of the 19th century, Charles Spurgeon, once wrote, “Without the Spirit of God we can do nothing. We are as ships without wind or chariots without steeds. Like branches without sap, we are withered. Like coals without fire, we are useless. An offering without the

sacrificial flame, we are unaccepted.” Perhaps we could add, like dry bones without life, we are dead.

Today, as we celebrate Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit in a new and powerful way in the story of the church, of the community of God, we might ponder again how the Spirit - the very breath of God - gives us life, and how we are called, like Ezekiel, to call forth that life, that full and abundant life - through the grace of God - to all the dry and dead bones that surround us. Let’s pray.

Friends, this scripture has been very much on my mind as I am surrounded by the chatter and buzz, the excitement and anticipation of re-opening Twin Towers. All across our Annual Conference, churches are just beginning to emerge from pandemic conditions and implement plans for in-person worship. It is an exciting time! While I most assuredly do not believe the pandemic left Twin Towers dead, in fact I think quite the opposite happened, we have surely been standing in a valley of death - COVID deaths, state-sanctioned, police-involved deaths, death by racism, by nationalism, and by poverty. And so this scene from Ezekiel resonates because it feels like we are standing in the midst of a noisy, rattling field as our communities are being re-configured, re-joined, and re-opened. (As an aside, we too are a part of that rattling around and you should know that we are targeting Sunday, August 1st for our first in-person worship service.)

But I can’t help but wondering, where is the breath of God, the Holy Spirit? How will we enter this new season not just as a collection of bones and flesh put back together, but be filled with the Spirit of God? What might that look like?

And so I want to say at the outset, our re-opening cannot be about going back, about returning to what was, about re-capturing what we lost. We can’t go back. The truth is that as much as we miss and grieve what was, there was a lot that was broken and not working back there. In fact, some might even say the Church (with a capital C) was an empty building, a meaningless social club, more concerned with preserving itself than being in the business of transforming and liberating life. The critique of the Church has been that we have lost our spirit - the Spirit - ruach - that blows through valleys of death, fields of fear, and great plains of injustice, and brings life - full, abundant, whole, and transformative life. It is that same Spirit that alighted on the disciples’ heads so many Pentecosts ago like tongues of fire and ignited a movement - in the way of Jesus - a movement of grace, of hope and of healing. The critique of the Church has been that we are more concerned with being comfortable than outspoken, with being at ease rather than being at attention, and with being so heavenly focused that we forget the dry, dead bones of this world.

Our re-opening can’t be simply be about returning, but has to be about moving forward, about being filled with God’s Spirit, about taking all that we have learned and experienced, all the ways

that we have changed and grown, and making way - being conduits - for God's breath, for God's breathing to enter into and fill our lives, our neighborhoods and our world. So let us get prepared, not just with our masks and disinfectant, our new signs and new protocols, but with deep prayer and discipline, with the constant invitation for God's breath - the Holy Spirit - to come and to fall afresh on us again. I implore you to make that your prayer - every day - for yourself and for us as a collective, as we begin the work of re-opening.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us. Melt us, mold us, fill us, and use us this day and always for we want to be a part of your great work of bringing life, hope, and healing to the world.
Amen.

SONG OF MEDITATION - Spirit of the Living God

Watch and listen here:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/10r_I4Kk5uyXAYVY-C8tQNSEZpKNMp07A/view?usp=sharing

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE – *Spend time in prayer. What did you hear for yourself through today's scripture and reflection? Talk to God about it. Then lift up the joys and concerns that are in your heart. You might write them down, speak them aloud, or pray them in silence.*

We would be honored to pray with you and for you.

Please send a note via text, mail, or email or give a call to our Healing Prayer Team.

SHARING OUR GIFTS– *How might you offer yourself and all that you have to God this week? How are you being invited to practice generosity? Spend a moment listening for God's direction.*

You are invited to contribute financially towards the purpose and ministry of TTUMC. We are a congregation committed to being conduits of God's healing in our neighborhood and beyond, and in so doing, impact the last and the least. You can contribute by mailing in a check, dropping off cash, or giving online via PayPal (visit www.twintowersumc.org). Take a moment and do that now.

CLOSING HYMN - "I'm Goin' a Sing When the Spirit Says Sing", UMH 333

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOHqgpRdBtY>

I'm goin' a sing* when the Spirit says sing, (x3)
and obey the Spirit of the Lord.

I'm goin' a pray...
I'm goin' a march...
I'm goin' a act...

BENEDICTION - <http://presbyterian.ca/worship/>

As you enter a new week,
may you experience God's presence.
May you feel God pouring out the Holy Spirit
over your heads and your thoughts and the words of your lips,
over your hearts and your feelings and emotions
and your compassion for all others,
and over your hands and your feet as you put into action all that God commands you.

During this week, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each of you; Amen.

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!

As we prepare our hearts, spirits, and minds for worship, please note:

- **New Worship Series Coming! Get Ready!** As a congregation committed to being conduits of God's healing in our neighborhood and beyond, we are going to dive deeply and intentionally into the healing stories of the Gospels in the coming season. We seek powerful healing for ourselves and a strengthening of our ability to be conduits of God's healing to others in meaningful and practical ways. I hope you are as excited and inspired as I am to start this series. Please consider who in your family and community might be longing for a word of healing...and invite them to worship with you!
 - You are strongly encouraged to purchase your own copy of **Miracle: When Jesus Touches Our Deepest Need** (Flora Slosson Wuellner) from your favorite local or online bookstore. [Please connect with Patty if you've had trouble finding a copy. She has 10 ordered!]
 - **Go Deep: Set aside Thursdays, beginning June 3rd, at 7:00 p.m.** for a time of rich reflection and powerful prayer as we dig further into the Miracles series. We will do so via Zoom.

Peace, *Emily*