

Sermon 2009 Pentecost
May 31, 2009
Text: Ezekiel 37:1-14
Theme: "The Fish that Would not be Flushed"

In our Old Testament reading we find the prophet Ezekiel wandering around in a valley of dry bones. The bones represent the nation of Israel, which though once a powerful giant because of their God, was now only a bunch of dry, crumbling bones. The city of Jerusalem had fallen to Babylon and the Lord's temple had been destroyed. Now God's people were much like the survivors of a natural disaster as they sifted through the rubble of their lives and tried to reconstruct some semblance of what their lives had been before they had abandoned God.

God promised Ezekiel that, though his people had abandoned him, he would not abandon his people, but in fact would restore them to their former glory. Those dry bones will once again take on flesh and those who are dead will have life breathed back into them. He instructed Ezekiel to call upon the Breath, which, in Hebrew, is the same word for Spirit, to breathe life back into his people. That happened for Israel when they were returned to their land some 70

years later but the complete fulfillment of this prophecy was yet to come.

A great step forward was taken when the Holy Spirit was given to us on the day of Pentecost and began to breathe life into the souls of God's people again. We are able to have faith in Christ because of what the Holy Spirit does. He calls us, gathers us, enlightens us and sanctifies us so that we are able to grasp the promise of salvation, but the prophecy is not completed. It is not completed because the prophecy has to do not only with our souls but with our bodies too. The soul and the body were never meant to be separate from one another. God did not just raise up a bunch of well connected bones, but he breathed life into them.

God does not intend for us to be a faithful bag of bones. Nor does expect us to be fleshly with no soul. He intends for us to be whole people again with sin removed and life eternal. I think that Christians have a hard time imagining what that might be like. We can imagine being holy and righteous and we can imagine being strong, young and healthy but putting the two together is difficult and that is the magic of Pentecost.

It reminds me of a story I heard from a family with a little boy. Like many little boys, this little boy, whom we will call Tommy, had a fish in his room in a fishbowl. Tommy had aptly named his fish, Fishie Fish. One day Tommy came running down the stairs to tell his mom that something horrible was wrong with Fishie Fish. Sure enough, Fishie Fish was floating upside down at the top of the bowl and the mom knew that Fishie Fish was not practicing the backstroke. Fishie Fish had gone to the great beyond.

The family gathered, not Fishie Fish's family of course, but Tommy's and they lifted Tommy's faithful fish friend from the fishbowl in his net and solemnly proceeded to the bathroom where Fishie Fish would receive a burial at sea. Having said a few comforting words, the mom tipped the net and plop went the mortal remains of the dearly departed Fishie Fish into the waters of the upstairs porcelain Fish Cemetery. The mom pulled the handle and Tommy burst out crying as the waters began to swirl to the depths.

The mom glanced into the bowl to see if Fishie Fish was gone and lo and behold, there was Fishie Fish swimming upstream just as hard as his little fins would fly. Never had anyone seen a fish fight so

valiantly to live. Suddenly, what had began as a fish funeral changed into a full out rescue. The mom grabbed the net and scooped Fishie Fish up from frigid tempest in the toilet bowl and deposited him back into his nice warm fishbowl where he happily lived for some time to come.

Something is that water, and frankly no one really wanted to know what, but something in that water revived Fishie Fish and he began to swim for his life. It was a hopeless situation for a fish to out swim a flush and yet, Fishie Fish gave it his all and was delivered.

We too were found dead, floating upside down in the fishbowl of our lives. Oh our bodies functioned to some extent, but our Father was not satisfied with a functional bag of bones shuffling through life. So he lifted us out of this shallow life and dumped us in the water, Baptismal water, and breathed life into our souls. Now we grasp that we are swimming for eternity and we are swimming as hard as we can through this swirling tempest.

Our world right now can often be compared to that porcelain fish cemetery in which Fishie Fish found himself. There is always a pull downward as the devil and our sinful flesh seek to pull us away from

God. But we have been revived and we are fed by the Holy Spirit with Word and body and blood, keeping our faith strong and knowing that the day of complete fulfillment will one day be here when we are plucked out of the waters and delivered to eternity.

There is no doubt that we grow weary from time to time swimming against the tide and perhaps we sometimes think that it would be so much easier just to go with the flow. But then, we know where that leads don't we? No matter how much mood lighting, incense and crepe paper one adds to it, a sewer is still a sewer.

Today we celebrate Pentecost, the day when the Holy Spirit came in a gust of fire to enliven us, to nourish us, to cheer us and to comfort us as we continue our battle against the pull of evil, shallowness and selfishness onward and upward towards glory. AMEN.