

The Day of Pentecost

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May 20, 2018

Text: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Theme: “Breathe!”

Big days can take our breath away. We like that when it’s a good event like getting married, or the birth of your child, or confirmation day. But then there are those more knocking the breath out of you bad days like losing your job, or your spouse leaving, or death of a loved one. Yes, big days can leave us breathless. Maybe we need one of these, a bag valve mask (courteous of Bryan Mattes) to pump us up. One of these can be a life saver, a remedy, or at least a stop gap measure for that breathless problem.

Today is a big day, a big day that comes around every year. It is the Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is poured out in a spectacular way, one that may have left more than a few breathless. Peter will breathe out words of condemnation followed by words of salvation to fill breathless hearts. Today is a big day for Addi, Kaley, Georgie, Lucas, Luke, and Zach. It’s the day of Confirmation. It’s an added bonus that this day coincides with Pentecost. These six young people get to confess their faith before you today. Does the thought of that leave them breathless? Today is a day for all of them and all of us to continue to breathe—the breathe in the divine breath that God gives. Without it we are breathless.

Our text for today is our OT lesson from Ezekiel, Ezekiel 37, probably the most familiar section of Ezekiel. His words were delivered to a breathless people. Ezekiel was in Babylon among the exiles from Judah. Ezekiel was with the second of three exile groups. This second group was quite a bunch of folks, many talented and important folks. They had been carried away with the King of Judah, Jehoiachin. We know from Ezekiel 1:1-2 that Ezekiel the priest was among them. They had been there a while when God's Word first came to Ezekiel. By the time of our text they had been there a while longer.

Ezekiel is given a vision, a vivid vision of a valley voyage, not a pleasant stroll.

This valley was full of bones, human bones, all strewn about. They had been there a while, quite a while for the bones are described as being very dry. This would have been a rather hard thing for Ezekiel the priest to experience. To touch the dead was to make one unclean, and the thought of bones being left unburied exposed to the elements and the animals was quite disturbing. Luke's confirmation verse is Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." The trouble was the people of Judah had not looked upon God as their refuge and strength and now there was plenty of present trouble as symbolized by all these dry bones.

God asked Ezekiel if these bones could live? It would appear "no," but Ezekiel deferred to God, "O Lord, you know." (vs 3) God instructed Ezekiel to prophesy to these bones, to speak into them life. And he does.

He speaks as instructed and as he speaks a rattling, or even a quaking. The bones are coming together, bone to its bone, the old foot bone to the heel bone, and the heel bone to the ankle bone and the ankle bone to the leg bone, etc. But it's more than merely reassembled skeletons. There's meat on these bones, human flesh and skin. But initially they are still breathless, dead, just better looking reassembled dead.

There were a lot of dead in Jerusalem, soon to be the assembled dead. In Jerusalem there is not a rattling or a quaking but sound like the rushing of a mighty wind. The people, devout Jews from all nations assemble to find out what's going on. Peter explains what is happening, why it is they hear the words being spoken in their own native language from these Galileans. He tells them it's not from the influence of early morning spirits, no, it's the Spirit the Spirit being poured out that Joel spoke of. It was the Spirit now poured out by Jesus. 'You know the Jesus I'm talking about, the one you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men (2:23).' But news flash—'He's dead no longer. God has raised Him up. We are witnesses. He's now at God's right hand (2:32, 33). This One, the One for whose blood you were crying out, God has made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.' (vs 36)

These words of Peter knocked the wind right out of them. They were cut to the heart. There was not a word spoken either in defense or defiance, no instead the words, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (vs 37) They were breathless.

So we are here today to hear our young people breath out words of faith. You'll be asked some questions among which is, "Do you intend to live according to the Word of God?" God has not left us guessing as to how He would have us live. He shows us in the Ten Commandments what He would have us do and have us not do. "We should fear and love God so that..." We have this fear and love, the curb and the guide. The curb warns there are consequences if you deviate off the path, and the guide says blessings staying on the path. In love we want to stay on, in fear, well the old nature wants to veer off, but is kept in check by the consequences. But there is also the mirror function of the law to show us how we are doing. God says you are to be up here, but the law shows us we are way down, down here. It shows us how bad off we are, those deserving God's judgment and justice, knocks any wind of self-righteousness out of us. If we think we pretty well have this righteousness thing figured out, another body blow from the law reminds us otherwise.

The law show us how to live, but it can never breathe into us life. Maybe we could put on a good outward show, like those reassembled, refleshed bodies, but still dead. Apart from Christ we were dead in our transgressions and sins, without God and without hope. (Ephesians 2:12)

But in Christ there is hope, sure, living hope. Georgie has chosen for her Bible verse Jeremiah 29:11, pretty familiar words, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." The words are familiar, but the context not so much. Right here it is, here along the banks of the Chebar

in Babylon. These words are part of a letter written by Jeremiah and sent to those in exile. What were these people facing? “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold they say, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.” (vs 11)

And they were, but God was going to change things. “Prophecy, son of man, say to the breath...breathe on these slain that they may live.” (vs 9) Zach’s verse is about being equipped for spiritual battle, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” (Ephesians 6:11) Ezekiel is about to see a great army. “So I prophesied...and the breath came into them and they stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.” (vs 10)

They were as good as dead as a people there in exile. They had heard that it had gotten worse as the city of Jerusalem had been destroyed, no place to go home to, yet God promised He would raise them from their Babylonian death and bring them back to their land. And it would come to be. Through that returned remnant would come the One who is the Hope and the Future.

Peter and all the apostles were witnesses to that One. God had come to restore, to save His people. Addi’s verse says it so well, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) He would complete His salvation mission. Yes, Peter and the others were there to see, to hear, to touch. Peter says Jesus was a man attested by God with mighty deeds and wonders and signs that God did through Him (Acts 2:22)

He was put to death, but raised up, now ascended to God's right hand and had poured out the Spirit whose work those in Jerusalem were seeing and hearing. It was for a wonderful purpose. Lucas' verse bears witness to it, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10) In love Jesus came and bore all the guilt for our sin, took the full blow of God's law for us.

This is the Jesus to whom Peter points those gathered. Peter tells them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) This is the Holy Spirit who breathes into us faith.

The Holy Spirit is the breath of eternal life. God has given us means through which He promises the Spirit will work. We need not look elsewhere, nor should we. This means the means must be used. This thing (bag mask valve) is not self-operated. You give this to a patient who is unconscious, turning blue in the face, and nothing will happen. Someone else must do it. We are not self-saved, it is the miracle of God. The breath of the Spirit blows not in this (BVM) but in the Gospel, the waters of baptism, and the bread and the wine. Zach, Lucas, Luke, Addi, Kaley, and Georgie, you had your day of Pentecost at your baptism. Now on this day of Pentecost you affirm the faith given and pledge your faithfulness.

Breathe, we have continual need to breathe in God's gift. The fact is spiritually, we are always on life support. That might scare us but it's true. The good news is God's good news always works. We have the continuing

need to breathe in God's life giving promises. The means are given and available. Think of someone suffering from COPD. He has need of oxygen. It is readily available, right at hand. Or suppose he needs an inhaler to help clear things up. But he says, 'No, I'll just do it on my own.' But he won't do it well, blue in face, increased heart rate, complications—death.

You will be asked, "Do you intend to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully?" You can hear here, or at Zion, and receive here. I've been using this Bag Mask Valve to symbolize the means of grace, God's breath to the breathless, but I don't think it's quite the same experience. The BMV is used to preserve life, not because someone enjoys the experience. But we do enjoy the means. The image is one of banqueting with God. God Himself is present. We receive His gifts. His law does show us the bitterness of our sin, but oh, the sweetness of the forgiveness of Christ. We hear the words, "I forgive you all of your sins." You are clean. We hear, "This is the word of the Lord." And as the bread in on our tongues and the wine passes our lips we hear, "this is the body of Christ...this is the blood of Christ—for you, yes, you—Luke, Addi, Kaley, Georgie, Lucas, and Zach.

As we gather to breathe we sing in Psalms and hymns and God speaks to us through the words we singing. We pray, praise, and give thanks. God continues to breath in you. He will not leave you as You take Him in again and again. Kaley's verse says as much, "Keep your life free

from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)

Breathe, we breathe in God’s promises together even as we will hear your promises of faithfulness to Him. One day with Him forever in glory, serving Him together in humble service. For Jesus’ sake. Amen