

Acts 2.1-12

Can these bones live?

Amington

Pentecost Sunday 31 May 2020

Come fourth...

The Lord said, 'Come fourth and receive the Holy Spirit.' But John came in fifth and only won a toaster.

That's a joke that only works out loud!!

Dead?

How's your faith doing? Where is it on a scale of dead, to alive?

If I'd asked the disciples that question, I imagine they have been much closer to 'dead', than 'alive'. They had watched Jesus die – buried him, even – and then seen him rise again, eaten with him, talked with him. They thought – and I don't blame them – that *this* was the time God's kingdom was coming.

But then he left. He went back to be with the Father, promising two things: that he would one day return, and that he would be with us always, no matter what, always, and forever.

But, still – he left.

We know the disciples felt pretty rubbish, because they were in hiding, locked away in a room. I suspect many of us sympathise with them in a new way now, given our experience of lockdown. I for one am getting pretty sick of the sight of my computer screens and study walls.

I hope that in some way these online services are helping to keep your faith going. I guess that if they aren't, you won't be watching anyway! But what we all need to keep going, is the Holy Spirit. And that's the *third* thing Jesus promised as he left.

Alive?

Do you ever just wake up and kiss the person sleeping beside you and feel glad that you are alive?

I did once and now I'm banned from flying with EasyJet.

The Holy Spirit is what makes us alive. Last year I preached on the Valley of Dry Bones in Ezekiel – they weren't just dead, they were Very Dead. God asked Ezekiel, 'Son of Man, can these bones live? (Ezekiel 37.3). Well, no – except they *did*, because of the power of God's *breath*.

In Hebrew the same word means ‘wind’, ‘breath’, and ‘Spirit’. In Ezekiel it’s *breath* we see – in Acts it’s *wind* – but it’s the same Spirit, bringing God’s life. In Ezekiel the dry bones became an army. In Acts the disciples became powerful speakers, dedicated missionaries, faithful martyrs – not because they were anything special, but because God filled them with his Spirit.

(Pause)

But I have question for you.

How often do you breathe? According to Wikipedia, the average adult breathes at least 12 times a minute – which is over 17,000 breaths a day. We don’t even notice, it’s as natural as – well – breathing. You don’t breathe once, and that’s it for the rest of your life! You have to *go on breathing*.

What about a grandfather clock? They are quite high maintenance because you have to keep winding them, or they – well – they wind down. You don’t wind them up once, and that’s it forever. You have to *go on winding them*.

It’s exactly like that with the Holy Spirit. The disciples were not filled once on Pentecost, and then sent on their way. Not at all! They *went on being filled* with the Holy Spirit.

In fact the book of Acts is really the story of how people went on being filled with the Holy Spirit.

God isn't stingy with the Holy Spirit. He doesn't give us a bit and then we have to make do with it for the rest of our life! No! He pours it out, lavishes it – on those willing to receive it.

No! The Spirit wasn't only given to give birth to the Church – *the Spirit is given to keep the church alive.*

'Son of Man, can these bones live?' God asked Ezekiel – and he asks us today. The answer now, as then, is Yes! But only by God's breath. Like the Valley of Dry Bones, the Spirit is our breath – we need to learn to receive the Spirit as we breathe. In fact you may find that a helpful way to pray: breathing in God's Spirit, and breathing out God's praise.

So I'll ask you again: where is your faith on a scale of dead to alive?

God wants you to be *alive*, and he wants to *pour out* his Spirit on you, he wants to help you learn to *breathe* so you can live life to the full, so you can live the life he's calling you to live.

But will you open yourself to receive this gift? Will you learn how to *breathe*?