

Bennoch Church 27th May 2012

Man. United v Man City, end of the season and it all comes down to two matches, played at the same time. Ideally to be watched on split screens or as they did on the highlights program, jump in time sequence from one match to the other. This morning, Pentecost Sunday, we jump from a valley in the desert to the city of Jerusalem. What is at stake is the Spirit of God.

Ezekiel felt the strong presence of the Spirit of God as he was set down in a valley, where the ground was covered with dry bones. His vision is a powerful one. He looks round and sees many bones. He hears, *“Mortal man, can these bones come back to life?”* He replied, Lord God, only you know that.

The Spirit comes dramatically upon the disciples; they were not transported to another place, but experience the noise of wind, symbolic of the power of God; tongues of fire, symbolic of God's presence, judgement and cleansing, and the language barrier is broken, established by God at the time of the ancient story of the Tower of Babel, where man's pride gets in the way and God intervenes so that they could no longer speak to one another. Pentecost turns the Tower of Babel upside down! Once again, people can hear and understand the language of others.

So crowds gather, and the disciples, fuelled by the Spirit of God and no longer afraid, leave the Temple courts and come out into

the streets of Jerusalem, and after a mixed response of amazement and scorn, remember, some said, 'these people are drunk', Peter addresses the crowd.

The prophet Ezekiel is given a strange task; he is to speak to the dry bones. Why speak to that which is dead? He is told to prophecy to the bones; life is going to come back into you! Then you bones will know that I am the Lord.

There was now certainly life in the disciples, out in the streets, proclaiming the story of Jesus.

*“This is what I will do in the last days, God says:
I will pour out my Spirit on everyone.
Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message;
your young men will see visions,
and your old men will have dreams.
¹⁸ Yes, even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will proclaim my message.” (Acts 2: 17-18)*

These ancient prophecies are indeed true says Peter, and through the Spirit of God, he will once again breathe life into his people.

The dry bones are the people of God. They were lifeless but not dead. All they needed was the forgiveness of the Spirit of God.

“So I prophesied as I had been told. While I was speaking, I heard a rattling noise, and the bones began to join together.⁸ While I watched, the bones were covered with sinews and muscles, and then with skin. But there was no breath in the bodies.” (Ezekiel 37: 7-8)

Yet something was still missing! The breath of God had not yet come into them. It had certainly come upon the disciples! Peter says to the crowds, listen to me and let me tell you what all of this means.

To witness an army of bones coming to life or to be in the streets of Jerusalem that day and witness the transformation of the disciples; that’s drama that impacts lives, never to be forgotten.

So the breath of God enters the bones, and by the wind of God that comes from all directions, they become an army for God. When you are dry, you have no hope. When you are dry, you have no future. For Peter, hope and future are tied up in the person of Jesus Christ.

“Listen to these words, fellow Israelites! Jesus of Nazareth was a man whose divine authority was clearly proven to you by all the miracles and wonders which God performed through him. You yourselves know this, for it happened here among you. But God raised him from death, setting him free from its power, because

it was impossible that death should hold him prisoner.” (Acts 2: 22, 24)

Man. City scored two goals in added time to win the Premier league, one of the most dramatic endings to a league season. The outcome was that close and the contrasting emotions of the different supporters were obvious. For one set a trophy is paraded, for the other, it is all about next year.

Our Pentecost stories have the same outcome and possibilities for all. The Spirit of God is not a new phenomenon. The Spirit was there at the creation of the world, witnessed by many in the Old Testament, including Ezekiel, and given as a special gift to the church of God at Pentecost.

The Spirit is about life and hope. It forms the army of God. The Spirit is about power and faith. It creates and holds together the church of Jesus Christ. That life, that hope, that power, has not changed.

As we celebrate Pentecost, let us once again reclaim the Spirit of God that brings life out of death and takes people from locked rooms of fear, out into the open, to witness and share the story of Jesus Christ. Amen.

