

A sermon preached by the Rev. Robert L. Hart, Pentecost Sunday, May 31, 2009, Ezekiel 37: 1-14, Psalm 104: 25-32, Acts 2: 1-21, John 15: 26-27, 16: 4b-15

You send forth your Spirit, O God, and bring all things into being; you renew the face of the earth. +In the Name of God, the holy and life-giving Trinity. Amen.

In late May, in the year 1845, three gentleman, prominent citizens of the City of Detroit and parishioners of St. Paul's Episcopal Church on Woodward Ave. met with Bishop McCoskrey of this diocese to convince him of the need for a second Episcopal Church on the growing edge of the city, the Jefferson Ave. corridor. And thus it was that on Thursday, May 29, of that year, Christ Church, Detroit, was born. The new congregation was so well organized and full of enthusiasm that one year later they had built and paid for their first church on this very site. The Bishop dedicated and consecrated it on Whitsunday/Pentecost, May 31st, 1846. The parish called the Rev. William N. Lyster as first rector. Charles C. Trowbridge, the real founding father of Christ Church, was elected Senior Warden. Mary Jacobsen, member of this church, is a descendent of Charles Trowbridge and a relative of William Lyster. She is a living link to the very foundations of this church.

This Pentecost marks the birthday of the Christian Church and celebrates the creative, unifying, empowering work of the Holy Spirit. Drawn into the continuing work of the Spirit we celebrate our heritage, our mission. What better way to do this than with water and the Holy Spirit, baptizing into our fellowship Isabella Marie Nihem. With little Isabella we renew our baptismal covenant and with the enlivening power of the Spirit coursing through the veins of this Body of Christ we commit ourselves to the continuing witness of Christ Church. 2000 years collapse into one event. With the throng gathered on the first Pentecost we hear the Gospel as one people. Gathering to baptize and learn from our heritage we are ready to begin a new chapter in the history of this parish. The Holy Spirit who was present on Pentecost in Jerusalem was present on May 31, 1846, and is present on this Pentecost, 2009.

One thing we need to be clear about, one thing our history will teach us. The Holy Spirit works with a stubborn, resistant material – us. Yet, the Holy Spirit is patient and persistent. If you look at the galleries in either transept of the church you will find that each has an outdoor entrance. We didn't want the servants and people of color to miss out on worship, but we didn't want them sitting down here with us. Canon Bill Logan tells me that when he first came to Christ Church as a young priest in 1951 his first assignment was to get the Syrian youth group and the other, non-Syrian youth group, speaking to one another.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to bring humanity together in Christ. What does the story of the first Pentecost tell us? "...each one heard them speaking in the native language of each." "...in our own language we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." The Spirit didn't obliterate the differences among us. The Spirit gave us a common faith, a common mission and made us one people. The Spirit gave us ears to hear. And so St. Paul wrote that in our

baptism we are no long Jew or Greek, male or female, even though we are. We are one body, the Body of Christ.

The work of the Spirit is to show us what this means, to bring the folks down out of the galleries, in through the front door and give them a seat in the midst of the assembly. The work of the Spirit takes people of differing economic, social, racial and ethnic backgrounds, people of differing genders and sexual orientations and patiently, persistently forges them into one community, the Body of Christ. And this is what the Spirit has been doing with Christ Church and will continue to do with our cooperation and despite our blindness.

The other work of the Holy Spirit is to create and renew – to give life to dry bones. I believe the Spirit can renew and build this parish to be the Beacon of Hope it proclaims itself to be. The psalm declares God to be the giver of good gifts, that by God's Spirit all things spring into being, filled with life and the face of the earth is renewed. That can and is happening here. A people of faith never doubt it.

We know all too well what the church, the city and the region faces. Back in 1975 the Detroit poet, Jim Gustafson, looking out over the city eight years after the riots wrote:

“Detroit just sits there ... sighing deeply, knowing that nothing can save it now.”

Gustafson wrote good poetry. He wrote what he saw and felt. We musn't let it rise to level of prophecy.

The Spirit prophecies of what God can do. Ezekiel saw only death. He looked out over a valley of dry bones, the bones of the slain. God asked Ezekiel, “Mortal, can these bones live?” To Ezekiel, only God could answer this. So God commands Ezekiel, “Prophecy to these bones.” That's God's summons to us through the Spirit. Because God desires to breath into the dead, dry things of human life and give them life. There was a time when the House of Israel wanted to say, “Our bones are dried up, and hope is lost; we are cut off completely.” When we want to say, the industrial empire is dead and we are without hope, cut off. God says through his prophets, “I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live.”

Find the vision, prophesy in the Spirit and God will bring about a new thing. That is the work of Christ Church situated as we are in the heart of the valley of dry bones. For this is where God has chosen to tell the bones “stand up and live.”

In one month we will welcome John Talk as priest and rector. He comes to join us in this work of the Holy Spirit. John arrives not as prophet or savior but as your priest, a part of the community of faith. Nonetheless his coming marks a beginning. God chooses it as an occasion to renew the work begun in 1845. The Spirit is patient and persistent. The Spirit is stirring things. You and your new rector are blessed with a mission in a time of great need and expectation. Rise up and prophesy to these bones. Give little Isabella a vibrant community of faith and a thriving city so that she will celebrate here her heritage and her future for years to come. Give her what Mary Jacobsen has known for over nine decades. The Spirit is among us to make it happen.

