

*Arvada*  
United Methodist Church

May 31, 2009

*C'mon Now, Light Our Fire*  
Acts 2:1-18

Rev. Rusty Butler

I was talking to a group of friends here last week, we were discussing how important the Sunday of Memorial Day is for so many folks, and I suggested that the next Sunday (this Sunday) is even more important for the church. And they said, "What!?" I asked them do you know what next Sunday is? And they said, "No..no we don't know." I said, "You've got to know! It is so important for the church." And they said, "We should get better teaching from our Pastor." I thought that was funny. I said it is Pentecost! The Birthday of the church! It is a big day for the church!

I thought, now why don't we know that? But this week, I looked at about 10 years of what I thought would be Pentecost sermons from one of our previous pastors...he never mentioned the word...there were no Pentecost sermons...and I thought to myself...no wonder all these folk don't know about Pentecost. I'm still trying to clear things up for myself when it comes to all that you believe and all you do. I'm still learning new things about you all even after these four years. My goodness.

Would you pray with me?

O God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts find a way toward spirit.

I want to take us back along time ago. Back before the time the country was formed, back before the great artists of the Renaissance, back before the Dark Ages, back before the birth of Christ, I'm talking way back. Back before the Roman Empire was founded, back before Alexander the Great was born. I want to take you back to the year 592 Before the Common Era.

Are you with me?

There was a man named Ezekial who was one of the Jews who were in the Babylonian Captivity. We know him from that song we used to sing along time ago. Ezekial saw the wheel way up in the middle of the air. Do you know that song?

The Babylonians had come in and conquered Israel. They had taken the first batch of deportees back to Babylon (present day Iraq) to be servants and Ezekial was one of these first batch of people.

Ezekial got a word from the Lord. For the first 36 chapters of his book, it is not a pleasant word. Ezekial just rails at people, his own people, other people...nobody is immune from the hard word of the Lord.

You do not want to go near that stuff without some good antacid pills next to your chair.

303 421 5135 6750 Carr Street 80004 arvadaumc.org

*A church where science, religion and life are compatible*

*Arvada*  
United Methodist Church

It's just awful stuff, listen to just a few words from Ezekial, Chap. 5:

“Therefore says the Lord God, I, I myself, am coming against you’ I will execute judgments among you in the sight of the nations And because of all your abominations I will do to you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again. Surely, parents shall eat their children in your midst, and children shall eat their parents. I will execute judgments on you and any of you who survive I will scatter to every wind.”

Parents eating their children and children eating their parents?!! Whoosh. That is tough stuff, and it doesn't stop just keeps going on and on.

Well, finally, in Chapter 37...a reprieve, Ezekial gets another word from the Lord, and Ezekial says, “...the hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley. It was full of bones. He led me all around them...there were very many in that valley and they were very dry.” God said to Ezekial, “Mortal, can these bones live?”

And Ezekial answered, “I don't know.” At least that's the way I read it! “You know!” he says to God. And God said, “preach to these bones, say to them, O dry bones hear the word of the Lord, I will cause the spirit to enter you and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you and will cause flesh to come upon you and cover you with skin, and put the spirit in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

So Ezekial got to preaching, and sure enough the bones came together, and then sinews came upon on them, and then wonder of wonder skin on them...but alas! There was no breath. No spirit.

And the Lord told him to preach again to the bones and so Ezekial tried it again and sure enough the spirit came into the bones and they lived and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Now you know how sometimes in the Bible the stories don't get explained, and then everyone around thinks, hey Jesus just walked on the water, or hey that iron axe head floated, or hey that young virgin got impregnated by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes the stories don't get explained.

But this one...this valley of the Dry Bones...it gets explained. Right there, you can't miss it.

Ezekial writes, “God said to me Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, “our bones are dried up and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely. Therefore say to them, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from your graves, I will put my spirit within you and you shall live and you will know that I, the Lord have spoken and will act.”

*Arvada*  
United Methodist Church

Whoosh...

Now that my friends is one heck of a sermon.

Flash forward...oh, how about 600 years or so. The apostles are just waiting for something to happen. They are just like old dry bones. You know. Just laying in the grave. They don't know, Jesus is gone and said he would send the breath of God to them, but they don't know. They don't know what's going to happen.

They are gathered together and sure enough there is a sound like the rush of a violent wind, maybe something like.....Whoosh!!! And there is something like a tongue of fire appearing among them and a tongue rested on each of them...All of them began to speak in other languages and they went out into the crowd and the crowd heard and saw what was happening and they heard a sermon from Peter. And oh my.

And what do you know...and what do you know. A church is born.

Whoosh.

Two weeks ago on Monday night I got to listen to Bishop Desmond Tutu. Now I know most of you know who Bishop Tutu is. He is 83 years old and he won the Noble Peace Prize for his work in ending Apartheid in South Africa. He was the chair of the Commission on Truth and Reconciliation. He is a Bishop of the Anglican Church.

Bishop Tutu was the featured speaker on Monday night at the Homiletics Convention. 2200 preachers from around the world, but most from here in the United States. We all knew we were going to be in the presence of greatness. His faith had led Bishop Tutu down roads where we would never go, His positions had earned him various death threats through the years, he had taken up the battle and had persevered.

He got up to speak...dressed in a Cardinal Red Cassock and skull cap. Stunning, he looked like a flame standing there in the pulpit. And the word he kept saying over and over that night.....was "fantastic". All these preachers gathered from across the US and the world,...fantastic...he went on...the change brought about by people like Martin Luther King, Jr. fantastic.... the church when it is doing God's work...fantastic....an African American president...fantastic.

At a certain place in the sermon, he said, I know how people like to put people on a pedestal. It makes them feel like they cannot do what the people on the pedestal can do and so they don't even feel they need to try. But he looked at us all and he said, "But under this robe, we are all the same."

After the laughter, you could of heard a pin drop. Whoosh!! He is right...we all have that possibility to stand up, do what's right, bring justice where there's injustice. Whoosh.

303 421 5135 6750 Carr Street 80004 arvadaumc.org

*A church where science, religion and life are compatible*

*Arvada*  
United Methodist Church

Woody Allen said that, “90% of success in life is just showing up.” But John Wayne had another idea, he said, “Just showing up doesn’t get the job done.” One financial firm said that 33.33% of life is showing up, 33 1/3 percent is preparing, and 33 1/3 percent is being in the moment.

In a way I guess that is all about right.

Yesterday we had about 70 people show up, but they did more than just show up, they put their heart, and mind, and energy into dreaming for the church. The dreamers and the visionaries were there..charting our course into the future.

I got a phone call on Friday from a couple who are members of the church. Rick had just returned from Iraq where he has been working for the last five years. They said they wanted to take me to lunch. And I said OK!

They told me that a couple of women were coming as refugees from Iraq and they wondered if the church would be able to help them set up an apartment. I said of course we can do that.

So Stephanie sent me a list of things they needed and I typed them out on a sheet of paper and then cut the strips and attached it to a poster board and I took it to the visioning session. I explained what was needed at the end of our visioning session and right near the end...I looked over by the door where people were huddled around that poster trying to figure out what they could give to the two women from Iraq. And I swear, you may not believe me, but I swear I could almost see tongues of fire over those people and a sound...it sounded like, whooooosh...