

In the name of God, who through the Word and in the Spirit creates, redeems, and sanctifies. Amen.

A few weeks ago, on what we call Good Shepherd Sunday, we read a translation of Psalm 23:

The Lord is my shepherd,  
I shall not want.  
In grass meadows God makes me lie down,  
by quiet waters guides me.  
My life-breath God brings back.  
The Holy One leads me on pathways of justice  
For the sake of God's name.

We talked in Bible study afterward, about the idea of God sustaining and reviving our life-breath; the Hebrew word used in that psalm is nefesh, and we often translate it as soul. In today's reading from Ezekiel, we have the English word breath again; but the Hebrew word is not nefesh, for life-breath or soul; the Hebrew word used in this passage from Ezekiel is ruach, which we more often translate as Spirit. Ruach is what moved over the face of chaos at creation and brought forth the earth and sky and creatures in the Book of Genesis. And ruach, God's spirit, is what finally brings those dry bones, the bones of the slain, back into the possibility of

life, that brings them up from the grave of hopelessness into the possibility of a blessed future.

Notice that God does not do this entirely alone; God commands Ezekiel to prophesy, to call on the Spirit of God to inhabit this lost, vast multitude.

God worked with and through Ezekiel to bring about this vision of life brought back from death. This is a grand vision; but as partakers of God's spirit, of the ruach breathed into us we, like Ezekiel, become co-creators with God of this new and renewed world. Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz says that "The Creation story reminds us of our potential to create. In the face of unforeseen challenges... we can still possess the courage to create. In building community, bringing about change in the world... we have unique creative gifts to share." God breathes Spirit into us so that we can make real God's vision for the healing and reconciliation of humankind. Rabbi Yanklowitz continues, "When God says, 'let us make human beings' [in Genesis] it has been suggested that God is talking to humanity as a partner. God transcends nature, and we are asked to do the same: To acknowledge that *what is* does not necessarily *have to be* as it is... God works through us to create change in the world."

The Spirit within us that was present at creation is continually at work, moment by moment, day by day to make a reality God's longing for our wholeness. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, reminds us of this continual work of the Spirit; that ever since humanity's relationship with God became broken, the Spirit has laboured to give birth to us anew, to work within us on our re-creation, coming alive in our weaknesses, and giving us a prayer of the heart, not of words, that binds us ever more closely to the heart of God.

God, even when incarnate in the human body of Jesus, never works without us. God calls everyone to embrace our gifts and to welcome the Spirit of God in to us to use those gifts, to labour with us, to renew the face of the earth, to renew humankind as God's creation, not the creation of our own desires, fears, and weaknesses.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "It is to your advantage that I go away." Jesus understands that if he remains on earth, we will never undertake our role as co-creators with God of the new, coming kingdom. God did not intend, with one sweep of God's almighty arm, to set everything right and leave us as bystanders watching the miraculous change. God invites us to

be integral actors in the work of redemption; God did not become incarnate to do everything for us; God came to draw us into the work that God is unwilling to perfect without us.

John of the Cross likens God to a mother teaching a child to walk. She sets the child down on its feet, then steps back. The child raises its arms to be picked up, the child cries, the child falls and skins its knees, the child cries some more, crawls a little way; the mother patiently puts the child back on its feet and steps back again. Through tumbles and tears, with great patience, the Mother teaches the child of its own potential, its own possibility to accomplish something utterly new and wonderful. Rabbi Yanklowitz concludes, “Every person is full of potential. The opportunity within each major good work and every minor good work, and in every waking moment, is to imitate the Divine and miraculously create something new.”

Ezekiel is told to call on the Spirit to breathe life into those who are lifeless. The Hebrew word for breathe suggests something of power and force; it is used in other passages that speak of blowing into a furnace or forge to make the fire hot; it is related to the word inflame in ancient Syriac. This

day, Pentecost, we remember the Spirit breathing fire into the disciples, so inflaming their own spirits that they are driven out into the streets proclaiming God's unimaginable longing to make us co-creators with God of an entirely new world, to bring us into labour with God to give birth to a new and holy reign of justice, love, and peace. Pentecost reminds us that the Resurrection was not the culmination, the end of God's work to redeem us; it was a beginning. And Pentecost is the continuation of that work begun at Resurrection, a work of re-creation that God wants us to complete with the grace and strength of God's Spirit.

God has breathed into us that same fiery Spirit that moved over the face of chaos at creation; do not quench that fire, but instead let that fire blow through us, cleanse us, and bring us back from the death we have fallen into by abiding in our fears and desires, rather than abiding in God. God is willing and has acted to create us entirely new; God is unwilling to do that work alone, and has acted to stand us on our feet so that we can daily walk toward that new creation. May it be so.