

19 May 2024  
The Feast of Pentecost

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Spirited Eyes, Ears, Hearts, and Lives”

Text: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The untrained eye misses a lot of things. I can look at a fifty dollar bill and think it perfectly fine. But someone who is trained to spot counterfeit money can see in an instant all the imperfections, omissions, and flaws my untrained eye cannot see. Law enforcement officers, too. I can look at someone and think they are acting perfectly normal; they're just like me. But a police officer can see small things I miss that tell them that person is hiding something; that person is trouble.

This is true for ears, too. We went to my daughter's symphony concert last weekend and I enjoyed the music. But I'm sure my untrained ear missed many of the subtleties of the music and what the composer was doing with certain notes, certain instruments, and certain movements. And so for a medical professional, too. If I listen to a heartbeat through a stethoscope, I hear a heartbeat. But their ears can hear small sounds that might mean big trouble.

Now, look around. In the world. Even in this congregation. What do you see? What do you hear? Now think: What does God see? What does God hear? Do you think He and His all-present, all-powerful, and all-knowing eyes and ears can see and hear things we do not? Of course, right? He sees the person who looks perfectly fine to us, but who is really confused and unsure about what to do, and scared that they make the right choice. He sees the man who is a pillar of the church but who is filled with guilt because he is not the husband or father he knows he should be. He hears the pain of that young person who says everything is fine, when it's not, because they think they can't do anything right.

What does God see when He looks around? A valley of dry, dead bones. People who *were* full of life, but who sin has dried up and robbed of life. Ironically, this is how some people see the church! The world is where life is, fun is, freedom is! The church is where you *don't* have those things - going to church, Bible study, family devotions, being faithful, not going along with the latest sin *du jour* - is boring, lifeless, dries you up, and sucks all the life out of you! Those are pretty opposite ways of looking at things! So the question is: who is looking with untrained eyes and who is seeing what others miss? Who is hearing with untrained ears and who is hearing those small things that mean big trouble? That's a pretty important question, don't you think?

On the day of Pentecost - the very first *New Testament* Pentecost, that we heard about today in the reading from Acts - there was confusion about this, too. The people who were in Jerusalem heard the sound of *the mighty rushing wind from heaven*, but they didn't know what to make of it. They each heard the apostles speaking in their own language - the Medes in Persian, the Arabs in Arabian, those from Mesopotamia in Assyrian, and lots more. But what did it mean? How could it be? They must be drunk! Babbling. Out of their minds.

But Peter and the other eleven knew exactly what it meant. They hadn't been drinking. It was only 9 am! They were filled not with liquid spirits but the heavenly Spirit, the Spirit of God. The Word of God spoken through the prophet Joel was being fulfilled. What the crowds could not see and hear rightly, Peter and the eleven could. Receiving the Spirit of God, they could see with God's eyes and hear with God's ears.

So when Peter and the others stood there and looked out at that mass of people, you know what he saw? He did not see *Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, Cretans and Arabians*. That's what *untrained* eyes saw. Peter and the others saw a mass of dry, dead bones. **So Peter became the new Ezekiel**. Peter did what Ezekiel did. He preached. He preached to the bones that they live. That they be brought to life by the Word and Spirit of God. And just as with Ezekiel, it worked. Which should not surprise us! God's Word is living and active, filled with the Spirit of God, and does what it says. And if you read on in Acts chapter 2, beyond what we heard today, you hear the rest of Peter's sermon, as he preaches about Jesus and His death and resurrection, and we find out that 3,000 people believed and were baptized that very day. Peter and the others got to see all those dry, dead bones rise up and come to life.

Which really is the true miracle of Pentecost. The mighty rushing wind and what looked like little tongues of fire that rested on the twelve get all the press. But what happened *after* that - and *continues* to happen after that, all the way to today - is the real story. That the Word and Spirit of God continue to give life. The Word and Spirit of God continue to raise up dry, dead bones to life. The Word and Spirit of God enable us to see and hear rightly, and truly. That we not be deceived by the world and where it says life is and is to be found, and so chase after those things. But see through that, and hear those small things, those small lies that lead to big trouble.

**That's the work of the Holy Spirit**. The Holy Spirit, also called *the Helper* and the *Spirit of truth* by Jesus. The Holy Spirit who enabled Peter and the eleven to see and hear and know exactly what was going on that first Pentecost, and who enables us to see and hear and know in the same way. Which is what Jesus was teaching the disciples in the verses we heard from John today. Jesus told the disciples *they would bear witness*, they would testify, because with the Holy Spirit they would be able to see and hear in truth - not only what everyone else could see and hear, but what got missed by untrained, or

maybe we could say, *unspirited*, eyes and ears. That Jesus is not just Jesus of Nazareth, or Jesus the crucified, but Jesus the Son of the living God; Jesus the one who died but is now risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, and lives and reigns to all eternity.

So, Jesus teaches them, the Holy Spirit, whom they would receive after He ascended back to His Father, would teach them and enable them to see and hear and know rightly and truly. And specifically to see, hear, and know of three things rightly and truly: (1.) themselves, (2.) Jesus, and (3.) satan.

**First**, themselves, ourselves. It is the Spirit who enables us to confess: *I am a poor miserable sinner*. The Spirit opens our eyes to see sin truly, and to see the sin in me. And to see the sin that is in the world and that chasing after that is not going to give me life. To the untrained, unspirited eye it looks like it; it looks fun and fulfilling and better than church and following God's Word! But the spirited eye sees through that, and the spirited ear hears false gods that promise the world but in the end, give nothing but sadness, division, trouble, and death. Look around. The world's a mess! Why? Maybe your life's a mess. Why? *Dry, dead bones*.

And then **second**, the Spirit enables us to see Jesus as not just a prophet, a good man, or an example, which is what untrained, unspirited eyes can see - but as Saviour. As the one who came to get us out of this mess by taking our sin and death upon Himself and overcoming it, conquering it. Dying for us in what looked like defeat, but then rising for us in victory, to give us dry, dead bones life again. Those crowds in Jerusalem that first Pentecost knew only of the defeat; Peter preached to them of the victory. And by the Word and Spirit of God, dry, dead bones came to life.

And **third**, by the work of the Spirit, we know satan rightly and truly. Which sounds odd, doesn't it? How could we *not* know satan rightly and truly? But that is why so many fall for his lies today. His lies about where to find life and happiness and fulfillment, and that it's not in Jesus and His Word and truth that you find these things, but anywhere and everywhere else - anywhere and everywhere that fulfills your heart, your desires, whatever you think is good and right and true. But all that comes of that - sooner or later - is dry, dead bones. Satan has been judged, thrown out of heaven. And those who follow him - knowingly or not - sadly, wind up the same way. But the Spirit enables us to see and hear where true life and true joys are found. Life and joys that last more than a minute or a day, but forever.

And this Spirit you have received. For while 3,000 were baptized on that first Pentecost, how many countless others have been since? As the Word and Spirit of God have gone out into all the world, and every time the Word is preached, and every time a person is baptized, and every time a person repents and is absolved, that dry valley full of dead bones becomes a little less dry, a little less dead, and a little less full. And the church becomes a little *more* full, with those baptized and so risen with Jesus from that dry, dead valley of sin and death and alive in Him. With eyes and ears spirited to see and hear and

know Him as Lord and Saviour.

Spirited eyes and ears that will now also come to the Table today and see and hear and believe what others cannot - that here is not mere bread and wine, but the true Body and Blood of Jesus is fed to us and gives us that forgiveness, life, and salvation we need. That forgiveness, life, and salvation we need after we have once again stepped up and sat at the world's table and partook of its sinful swill that we *thought* was going to be tasty and good! And while maybe it was at first, it leaves a bad taste in your mouth. And it doesn't satisfy, doesn't fill you up, but leaves you empty. And you look around that table at those you thought were your friends, and realize they're not - they're only there for themselves. And even if they wanted, they can't give you what you need. For what can dry, dead bones give you or do for you?

But there is one who can, and at whose Table are the gifts we need and hunger for. Word and Spirit, water and word, bread and wine. An unseeing, unspirited world says: foolish, stupid, useless, dumb. But to those who have been given eyes to see and ears to hear and spirited hearts, here is life. For here is Jesus.

So on this Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out - a pouring out that has not ceased, but continues still today. And eyes and ears and hearts were spirited and opened, as they continue to be today. And dry, dead bones were raised to life, as they continue to be today. So while the mighty rushing wind and the little tongues that appeared as fire and the speaking in tongues may not be around today, the miracles of the Spirit continue. How do I know? Because you are here. Because I am here. That is the work of the Spirit. And that you resist the temptations of the world and of satan to sin, and that you repent when you give in, that is the work of the Spirit. And the love you give and the good works you do, that is the work of the Spirit. Which is why we say and sing so much today: *Come, Holy Spirit! Fill fill the hearts of the faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love.* That's what we need. That's what all people need. And He did, He does, and He will. So that all may see and hear rightly and truly. That all ***call on the name of the Lord and be saved.*** That all have life, now and forever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.