

# Sermon Text for July 30, 2017

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Ezekiel 37:1-14, Romans 8:9-11

***“Do you have the Spirit?”***

Have you noticed that whenever the concept of the Holy spirit and its significance in our lives becomes the main topic of the sermon a glaze seems to pass over the congregation’s eyes. We have been able to very successfully avoid this whole topic up until now. None of you noticed that I took some artistic liberty last week in Romans 8:1-8 when I talked about setting our minds on Christ. If you look back at those verses in Romans 8 you will see that Paul says we are to set our minds on what? The Spirit. But since we are all Trinitarian here I knew that you wouldn’t mind. But Paul in these first few verses in Romans and even before in chapter 7 repeats over and over again the presence and the importance of the Holy Spirit in our way of life. Today we are going to move away from the very practical steps that we ought to take in order to be a good Christian that we have been following and seeing Paul talk about.

We are going to look at a difficult theological concept that can be classified the meat of the Gospel. Up until now I have been feeding milk, I guess today we need to get a little more solid food. What is the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, this Spirit that Paul mentions over and over again in these verses? We are going to answer that question and we are going to see how important it is to have that Spirit in order to live as Christ would have us live. In both Ezekiel and Romans what we find is that the Spirit is life, the Spirit gives life, the Spirit is God who is and gives life. Without this Spirit, we die.

## **READ SCRIPTURE**

Each of us has an experience that we use to identify what we feel the Spirit is when we try to understand it. This is my most recent experience where I have felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. It isn’t so much the cuteness of the picture, it is the story that is behind this picture. Yes, it is a little girl with her hands up in the air for a song, but notice that everyone else has their hands in the air as well. This is a Presbyterian church and we don’t tend to raise our hands when we worship, but when kids are involved we tend to be a little more permissive. But what created the opportunity for this person and every person in this picture to raise their hands? A team of committed men and women with a common goal. To bring as many people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as possible. When you have this fertile ground, then, and only then, can the spirit work.

You can put people in a room, but if they are not committed to the same goal as we are committed during the week of VBS then something fun and exciting can happen, but the Spirit doesn't move. The Spirit of God moved during this last week.

The passages that we read in Ezekiel and Romans all point to one common meaning and that is: God will re-create his people in a way that can only be compared to calling them back from the dead. Have you ever had that experience, where you were going through what seemed like the motions and then all of a sudden God makes Himself known and you are awakened?

Let's look at how that happens in Ezekiel. Ezekiel, poor guy, is a prophet who really has not had much luck. Not as bad as Hosea last week, but God has given him two tasks, fairly easy ones and he's done them but the people of Israel have not responded to his prompts. These verses are Ezekiel's third attempt and he is given an apparently impossible task. God takes him to a valley of bones and asks Ezekiel: Mortal, can these bones live? How do you respond to that? Well Ezekiel does as any of us would, only you know Lord. One of the keys to understanding the Spirit and how it works is seen in these verses in Ezekiel. The Spirit works primarily through the community. Mark that down. God asks can these bones, live. Not a single person, but the whole valley of bones, the whole community.

In fact at verse 11 after God does indeed make these bones live he says, this is Israel. This community that has not set their mind on me, I will bring back to life. So as God addresses the infusion of the Spirit into Israel to bring life so God in Romans addresses the infusion of the Spirit into the church the body of Christ to bring life. The question that we need to ask ourselves today as a church, and I would say that we need to constantly ask ourselves and challenge ourselves with, is how do we get the Spirit again and again so that we can be renewed again and again.

How do we do that so that this church is not merely the pretty church in Amish country but rather the one that has the Spirit? In Ezekiel the key to the bones being more than bones is that the breath of God comes upon them and they are given life. The breath of God, you know the Hebrew word for breath is ruach, it means breath, spirit, air, wind. Think of the wind that moves over the unformed earth in Genesis. The breath that gave life to Adam, the Spirit that filled the Old Testament leaders. Each time that this breath, this Spirit is mentioned it says one similar thing. Look at verses 5 and 6, it gives life. This is the purpose of the Spirit throughout Scripture. It give life.

The same is true in the Romans passage. In verses 10 and 11 we read that the Spirit is life and then again Christ will give you life through his Spirit. What we heard in the Old Testament is true in the New. The word for Spirit, breath, air, wind is pneuma and we hear it mentioned over and over again in Scripture as that which gives life that is blessed and directed and guided by God. So when we ask the question do you have the Spirit we are really asking are you alive?

Let me clarify what the Spirit is by going through Scriptures that mention the Spirit. Then we will see what the Spirit is not as opposed to some common misconceptions and churches and theologies that you may have heard. We talked about Genesis beginning with the Spirit of God moving over the unformed face earth before creation. God breathes life in to Adam. In Judges every single leader, judge is said to be filled with the Spirit of God. Interestingly on Samson it is said that the Spirit rests mightily upon Samson. Every king in the Old Testament receives the Spirit of God but Saul has this Spirit removed and an evil one takes its place. Job isn't always real happy with God's spirit. The psalms talk about the Spirit over and over again. We hear the psalmist ask God not to take away God's Spirit from us, another psalmist gives up their Spirit. Psalm 104 talks about the presence of the Spirit in all of creation: when you take away their breath, they die, when you send forth your spirit they are created. Isaiah 61 we hear the Spirit of the Lord is upon me and in Joel the Pentecostal Spirit that fills our sons and daughters. Finally in Zechariah we hear that it is not by strength or by power by my Spirit says the Lord. The Old Testament is a consistent witness to the Spirit giving life and if you did not have God's Spirit you were dead.

We find the same message in the New Testament. The Spirit in the form of a dove descends on Christ and we hear in Matthew that for us the Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. When Jesus dies he gives up his spirit like the psalmist, but John also tells us that God is the Spirit so that Spirit remains and gives life in the resurrection. In Acts the day of Pentecost means the birth of a spirit-filled community. I Corinthians describes the Spirit and its life giving gifts. Last week we heard about the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians, and finally James tells us that the body without the Spirit is dead.

That is what the Spirit is: it gives life to the community of faith, to the body of Christ. The Spirit is not a litmus test with a list of things that you have to see in order to tell if some has or does not have the spirit. The gift of tongues is a gift that the Spirit gives, but is not given to everyone and is even considered by Paul a lesser gift. The Holy

Spirit is not something that we own, but rather is God and controls us. We cannot seek to control it by saying that the Holy Spirit only works in certain ways.

So the question that we started from is do we have the Spirit, understanding that the Spirit really has and owns us, but do we recognize and enjoy the benefits of the Spirit? The presence of the Spirit of God in the church means the presence of life. This church is alive, the Spirit moves through our each one of you as individuals, but especially moves through us as a collective body. The Spirit is moving and giving life to us and all those who come into contact with us. Encourage the Spirit to move and work through us so that we are always seeking for new signs and forms of life. When God says to us Mortal, can these bones live, we should be able to say, Lord these bones are alive, but show me how they can be even more alive. Amen.