

*"They will prophesy" – broader than foretelling, forth-telling: speaking out for God.*

19 "I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke.

20 "The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

**In practice** The disciples, like any of us, were a bit of an independent lot – Peter a bit too quick to 'make it happen', others were jockeying for position, Thomas with his own unanswered questions and women disciples, too, with their own perspective. On the day of the festival, they were all together, having become one in heart and mind as they prayed day by day. Prayer doesn't change God but changes us; when we are aligned, God can change the world through us.

The church could not pick up its mission or go anywhere without the Holy Spirit's leading and empowering. Where we frequently go wrong is to try to do what we can, by ourselves. Better, to take time to become aligned and in agreement with other believers – then God can use us.

**Question** Why is a prayer and praise language we can use without thinking about it, helpful?

## Romans 8:22-27 The Holy Spirit gives confidence to pray God's will

**He helps us to know what to pray for in hope and faith for what is not yet seen**

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

*"Groaning" – creation personified as a woman in labour, in both suffering and hope.*

23-25 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

*"Firstfruits" – a down payment on the fulfilment of God's blessings. We know of, and can live in the security of, being adopted with the full rights of*

**In practice** The believers in Rome who read this letter knew the power of the Holy Spirit and how He shapes our will. This changes how we pray. If we pray our desires or opinions, we may not be agreeing with the will of God. If we allow the Holy Spirit to draw us into His own intercession, we will inevitably be aligned with what He wants.

**Question** What ways can we pray more in line with God's will, e.g. using Scripture as a basis for prayer?

• *Apologies for small text size this week – long (but good) readings for Pentecost.*

21 "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

*"Wonders... and signs... before the coming..." – signs of the future consummation of the kingdom.*

*"Everyone who calls...saved" – not future timing, but inaugurated by Jesus for anyone who will show intent by responding in faith and turning to Him, Matt. 7:21.*

*sonship, 1 John 3:1, but the full experience is to come.*

*"Hope" – not 'will it, won't it?' but confident expectation that what is not, will be in the Lord's timing.*

26-27 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

*"Spirit Himself intercedes..." – The Holy Spirit is a person, one of the three Persons of the Trinity, whose relationship is so close that they are One God. So the Holy Spirit knows exactly how to pray for a person or situation in a way that matches God's will. His leading of us may be in words, in expression through an unlearned prayer language, or in ways that are largely silent.*

# The Living Word

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The Bible readings for Sunday May 20, 2018 with notes

## Church calendar readings for Sunday, May 20 in Bible order.

*Prepare for Sunday by reading and reflecting on the word for the week*

Ezekiel 37:1-14 – The Holy Spirit breathes new life into dry bones

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15 – The Spirit of Truth is Jesus' parting gift

Acts 2:1-21 – The Holy Spirit comes with a visible impartation

Romans 8:22-27 – The Holy Spirit gives confidence to pray God's will

## Ezekiel 37:1-14 The Holy Spirit breathes new life into dry bones

**Ezekiel has a vision of God putting His Spirit into His people to live again for Him**

1 The hand of the Lord was on me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.

*This vision follows on from God's promise of a new heart and new spirit through the impartation of the Holy Spirit – and repopulating the cities. But the exiles were scattered, with their hope evaporated.*

**For further study, see Ezekiel 36:26-27, 33, 35, 37-38**

2 He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.

3 He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

*"Can these bones live" – The people's hopes were not just dead but dried up and dismembered.*

I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know."

4-5 Then He said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.

*"Breath enter you" – difficult to capture in English is the word play where the one word ruach conveys three meanings, translated spirit, breath and wind.*

*For further study see Spirit, Ezek. 37:1,14; breath, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10; and wind or winds, 9. Also John 3:8.*

6 I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord."

7-8 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

*"No breath" – a body of connected bones and tendons and muscle needs respiration for life.*

9-10 Then He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army.

*"Prophesy" – speak out in faith for God. Ezekiel is to speak God's breath or Spirit into the slain from every direction, a complete renewal.*

11 Then He said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our

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bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'

*"Our bones are dried up" – Israel's hope had gone. There was no way back to being God's own people; they were not up for it.*

12-14 Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of

Israel. Then you, My people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.'

*"I will put My Spirit in you and you will live" – apart from God's presence, God's Spirit, there is no hope for God's people. Restoration must have a spiritual dimension.*

**In practice** Ezekiel saw death in the deportation following the fall of Jerusalem and saw the nation like those scattered bones.

We experience setbacks in life, church or Christian life too, and wonder why. Ezekiel's vision points to our unwillingness to view the spiritual dimension. God can bring Israel alive again, even as a mighty army, but without His Spirit there is no life, no hope. Without the Holy Spirit, there is no real life in anything, just dead orthodoxy.

**Question** Should we be joining God in speaking life into "dry bones" that we see?

## John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

## The Holy Spirit, Jesus' parting gift

**The promised Holy Spirit will show up sin and self-righteousness and the devil's lies**

15:26-27 "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of Truth who goes out from the Father – He will testify about Me. And you also must testify, for you have been with Me from the beginning.

*The Holy Spirit is as much a 'personal Person' as the Father or the Son. He is sent out by the Father, but we are told that He is the Spirit of Christ, 1 Peter 1:11, and the voice and revelation of Christ, vv. 14-15 below.*

16:4-6 I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, but now I am going to Him who sent me. None of you asks Me, 'Where are you going?' Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things.

*"When their time comes" – Jesus attracted persecution as a church steeple draws lightning, but He warns that on His departure, the attacks will come to the disciples, requiring robust Holy Spirit-empowered testimony.*

7-11 But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

When He comes, He will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in Me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see Me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

*"Prove... to be in the wrong" – or convict. The Holy Spirit's prompting to turn to Jesus, is to turn away from the world and its values, especially its self-righteousness and lack of sin awareness, and its judgments.*

12-15 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify Me because it is from Me that He will receive what He will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from Me what He will make known to you."

*"The Spirit of Truth... will guide you" – see John 14:26. The thrust of the gospel comes by revelation as well as information. In the same way that Jesus could do only what He saw His Father doing, John 5:19-20, the Holy Spirit will only speak what He hears.*

**In practice** Going back to Jesus' promise before His death and resurrection helps us to understand more about the life of the Spirit in our lives, now. One particular facet of this new life, which this passage teaches, is having the Spirit of Truth, or reality, residing in us. He helps us perceive spiritually beyond what we can see or work out. Before we form an opinion, we ask the Spirit of Truth to give us revelation beyond the information. He will guide us into all the truth (or all the reality) – if we let Him.

**Question** What helps you receive the Holy Spirit's revelation?

## Acts 2:1-21 The Holy Spirit comes with visible transforming power

**With a roar and flames the disciples were given the Holy Spirit and a new praise language**

1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

*"Pentecost" – the fiftieth day after Passover and harvest festival for the wheat harvest, was a time for remembering and renewing the covenants with Noah and with Moses and commemorating the giving of the Law on Sinai.*

2-4 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

*"A sound" – filling a space for 120. "All of them" was probably the 120, not just the 12. The Joel prophecy was for men and women, Joel 2:28-32 and quoted below v.18*

*"Tongues" – the word also means languages. Experience today is that the gift of an unlearned praise and prayer language often accompanies being filled with the Holy Spirit.*

5-12 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the

parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

*"Each one heard" – with the gift of tongues today, sometimes a person of different ethnicity and culture will hear words of praise in their own language. Jerusalem with its seven nations and three languages was swelled by "God-fearing Jews from every nation" visiting for the festival.*

13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

14-16 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17-18 "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

*"My Spirit on all people" – In the OT the Holy Spirit came on individuals to empower them in God's service as righteous kings, prophets, craftsmen etc. This promise, fulfilled at Pentecost, was for a Spirit-filled people, male and female, young and older, all of whom would know a Holy Spirit-inspired confidence in God's guidance and expressing God's ways.*