

# Homily for Pentecost 2021

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

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**S**OMETIMES I WONDER ABOUT THE ANGLICAN CHURCH. I wonder if its stuck and out of steam. Not every parish is that way, mind you. Small is beautiful in many circumstances. Not every parish is stuck and out of steam. But, all the same, I do worry about our Church.

O Mortal, can these bones live?

Last time I checked for the Anglican Churches in Africa things were booming. Churches in Africa are somehow different. By the way, did you know that there are more Black Anglicans in the world than there are White Anglicans?

Have you ever watched or listened to a worship service from a church in Kenya, or Zimbabwe, or South Africa and there, especially from the Townships? The liturgies are alive, vital, animated even dancing with life and joy. The circumstances are challenging; but, on the continent of Africa, it would appear the Church is alive and well.

O Mortal, can these bones live?

That's the question God asked the Prophet Ezekiel. And his response: "O Lord, you know." Translation, as Father Doug writes, is "*I don't know.*"

Prophecy is probably quite different than what most people think. A lot of people see prophecy as gazing wantonly into the future and making some random predictions—as some kind of soothsayer or oracle, a horoscope or a fortune cookie. That's not how the Prophets spoke.

How the Prophets spoke was about their present time, how they saw things around them in their community, in their cities, in their nation. What made their words prophetic was that they warned of the consequences of continuing on the same doomed course. The Prophets saw the outcome and the consequences of what was happening in their day if the course were not to be changed.

What sets the Prophets apart from others is their ability to see the wider picture and the consequences. The trouble is that often there's no recognition of a prophet in his own land.

The 1960's are gone forever and they will never return. Things will not go back to what they once were. We keep hearing that. The Church—Jesus' Body in the world—is in a state of massive change. We keep hearing that too. No longer will a community of faith be focussed only on one day a week. No longer will the Church be a passive, one-way, consumer-like exchange. It will be at its own peril that the Church does not learn to embrace new technology, for one example.

Long, long before a person ever considers crossing the threshold of a parish door, you want to be certain that they have checked over the church website to find out about that community of faith. And, they'll have checked many other church websites too.

If they *do decide* to become engaged, it could quite likely be in some small group, for some specific social justice project, maybe a prayer group or a scripture study group that gathers on a day and time other than a Sunday morning. It may not be in-person. The world has changed. People's routines

and practices have changed. The beginning of their becoming engaged could quite likely be totally online, 24/7 on any day of the week.

The Church of the future will be a hybrid of online and in-person points of connection. It will focus on *experiencing* Jesus, on an *encounter* with Jesus. The academic side of Jesus' teachings will not be the main part of what it's all about: it will be about *knowing* and *feeling* the presence of Jesus and putting his teachings into action in some tangible, measurable way... such as a targeted social justice project. A disciple could be engaged without ever coming on a Sunday morning. In some communities you can already see how this is happening when local folks come along side church folks to support outreach. They may never turn up on a Sunday but it is their local church... and they may not even be *Anglican!*

O Mortal, can these bones live?

Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath 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 breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.

The Church of England has been taking some daring steps in changing their course. They are hearing the words of the prophets. They have invested millions of pounds in their digital ministry and it would seem with considerable success. As an example, through some of their apps, in Seasons such as Advent and Lent, there has been more two-way—note that two-way—interactions with people in the UK than the number of people who physically attend church on Sundays. That's across the entire United Kingdom and that is before COVID! And, yes, that is a totally different kind of church, isn't it.

And so, O Mortal, can these bones live?

*Yes!* Yes, and things will be different. How exactly, I don't know but it will be very different if there is to be flesh on these bones. I can hear the noise and I can hear the rattling.

Listen again to the words of the Prophet:

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put

my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act,” says the Lord.

This is like the coming of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus tells us, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”

In an earlier chapter, the Prophet Ezekiel also explains what the Lord God said to him:

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Jesus cautions us that there is no recognition of a prophet in his own land. So, the question is for us: Can we recognize the words of the prophets in our own land?

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