

Two part Pentecost sermon

Part One: Possessed

There was a man named Bob.

Bob was a good man. He went to church every Sunday, well ..most every Sunday. He grew up in the church, and knew all the major Biblical stories; he was pretty familiar with the Bible.

After hearing the sermon about the Pentecost experience, he did something different– he went home and thought about it.

Granted, he does listen to the sermons, especially when there are jokes; however, it seems that he regards religious stuff as just that..... Albeit good stuff-with wonderful messages and ideals. That's what religion is, ... and then.... there is the real day to day life.
Church is about religion,.... and the rest of the time, life happens.

Yet, this day was different: he thought about Pentecost. He was sitting on his deck, and thought out loud..... it was almost like a prayer,
“I wonder why that indwelling of the Spirit never happens anymore?”

After a brief glance to the great above, he felt something...., and then heard a voice.
“Bob,.....I want to be in you.”
Bob looked around, but didn't see anyone.
He was a bit troubled about his hallucination, but then it happened again.

“Bob, I need you,..... and you need me. Can I come into your life?”

Bob was sure he was having a psychotic episode, yet if the voice was real.... So, playing it safe,...with a touch of hope, Bob replied,
“Yes, I would like to be filled with your Spirit.”

And then,..... nothing. Bob didn't see fire or a whirlwind.
He waited,..... and waited,..... and then commented out loud, “That's it? Are you there... orhere, andwell..... nothing happened? Not even a dust devil,..... oops.” I guess I should say a ‘dust angel.’”

Then he heard the voice again, “I'm here. I'm within you,... and you don't need to talk out loud. Your neighbours will think your crazy if you do. I can hear your inner voice.”

“Wow” Bob thought, and silently asked, “Is that you Jesus? Are you really IN me?”

“Jesus was my mortal persona. This is ‘I am.’”

Bob was beginning to think this whole ordeal was pretty cool, and so he asked, “I AM,..... do you mind if I call you God,..... and can I now speak in a foreign language,..... like what happened at the Pentecost?”

“Do you see any foreigners around that don’t speak English?”
“And, God is fine,.....just a bit generic, but that’s fine.”

Bob was now excited, “Okay God,.....now that I got you, will I be able to do some amazing things..... like miracles?”

“Of course!”

Bob’s mind was beginning to race: contemplating all the things he would do.

“BOB”

“Yes?”

I’m not going to make a new car appear, nor will I put 10 million dollars in your bank account.”

“Oh”

“But,..... I do want you to get in your car, and go to the grocery store.”

“You can’t even fly me and magically transport me there?”

“BOB.”

“Okay,... okay,....I get it,.... but you know it’s Sunday, and I didn’t think you approved of shopping on Sundays.”

God answered, “That’s okay..... It’s for a good reason,.....TRUST me.”

Bob went to the grocery store, and filled the shopping cart with items that ... just seemed right to select.”
Waiting in the checkout line, he thought, “Do I have to pay for this?”

Again, he heard the ominous, “**Bob.**”

Two hundred and eighty dollars later, Bob was driving down the road, asking, “Where am I going?”

“I’ll let you know when we are there. Trust me.”

Twenty minutes later, Bob was in a less than desirable part of town, and he had he had a feeling to pull into an apartment complex.

He mumbled as he grabbed the grocery bags, “I Trust this it the place, but what apartment?”

Just then, a door opened up, and a young lady with two little kids hiding behind her stood before him. She started crying, and said, “I’ve been praying for some money to buy food. I can’t believe this.”

After he dropped off the groceries, she gave Bob a hug and said, “Thanks. This is a miracle. Thank-you. Thank-you”

As Bob was heading back home, he heard the voice say, “See! I told you that you would do miracles and amazing things.”

Bob replied, “Miracle? That miracle cost me \$280 plus gas.”
Still, he knew.....

After ten minutes of quiet, contemplative driving, God yells out, “Stop! Pull in there.”

“What? Why?” Bob shouts back as he pulls into the parking lot.

“Flowers. I want you to buy some flowers”

Perplexed, Bob asks, “You’d like some flowers? Now? Why?”

“Yes, I love flowers, but they’re not for me. There for your wife, and get some nice ones.”

A bit perturbed, Bob responds, “I never buy flowers for my wife.”

“Exactly, you’re catching on.”

Bob mutters, “I’m going to go broke if I keep listening to you.”

Before he finished his sentence, God declared, “And,... after you give her the flowers, you’re going to take her out to a nice restaurant,... and not one of those franchise ones. I mean a place that has excellent food.”

“What?” Bob said out loud.

“Try not to use your vocal chords. People will think you’re weird. And, it’s important to take care of yourself with good food, and.... to care of those you love. ?You do love her?”

“Yes, I love her.”

“But, you never buy her flowers and rarely take her out to eat?”

Bob defensively answers, “She doesn’t need that stuff, and those things cost money.”

There was silence,..... until God petitioned Bob, “Bob, what is it that you need?”

More silence.....broken when Bob facetiously says, “A new car and 10 million dollars? I’m just kidding, but what’s the difference between blowing money on a new car or at a fancy restaurant?”

“Everything”, God answers and then states, “Tomorrow, I want you to take the day off work, so you can go on a long walk.”

Bob tried to squelch his thoughts from God, but God heard him thinking, "I'm not so sure about this indwelling Spirit / listening to God stuff. I got important work to do tomorrow. I can't afford to skip work for the sake of a long prance to who knows where."

Bob..... "You need to take care of yourself. You don't exercise enough, and you may be surprised by what you see and think about during a long walk. Trust me."

Bob blurts out, "I don't get it. I thought your Spirit would give me what I want, but instead,..... I'm feeling possessed! I don't understand."

* "*I don't understand* is a good place to begin. You were possessed before. Possessed by your job, possessed by money and possessed by merely feeling good for the moment, instead of....really being alive.

Your possessions were not life giving.

*I give you the Spirit of love, and love is what you need and what others truly need.

*Do you want me to leave you alone?

*Do you want me to leave you alone?"

Part Two: From the Valley

The Book of Ezekiel was so compellingly imaginative that in strict Jewish circles young people were not permitted to read it alone.

This passage contains one of the best known of the prophet's visions.

It comes from a long section (33:1-39:29) expressing hope for the restoration of Israel initiated by Yahweh.

Probably experienced soon after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 586 BC, it urges the devastated nation to look beyond that catastrophe to a future that vindicates God's justice and promises redemption.

The image of the valley of dry bones may well have come from an actual battle site.

Nobody knows for sure; however, the imagery of the silent stillness of what was once living is very profound.

In addition, Bones had a special meaning in ancient Hebrew thought. The Hebrew word *hetsem*, repeated eight times in this passage, derived from a root.... meaning to be powerful and hence indicated stability and firmness.

If the bones were strong and firm, then the soul was also strong.

Because of this relationship, careful attention was given to the burial of bones.

That these bones lay exposed long after death accentuated the spiritual tragedy which had befallen Israel.

There is a sense of complete apathy, lethargy and hopelessness.

The promised restoration was more than putting flesh on skeletons and resuscitation of the dead. It included the restoration of the whole community.

Moreover, the prophet's conversation with Yahweh (vss. 3-10) emphasizes that it is the Lord who takes the initiative to restore life to the skeletons.

Whereas the people had lost all hope of restoration (vs. 11), Yahweh insists that not only will they be raised from death and given a new life, but also they will return to their homeland (vss.12-14).

The effective agent of this resurrection is the Spirit of Yahweh (vs. 14).

Remembering that the Hebrew word *ruach* means breath, wind and spirit, we can see the play on the word throughout the passage in vss. 4, 6, 9, 10 and 14.

This connects to the creation stories of Genesis—the life giving breath of God—God's Spirit.

The same vibrant Spirit infused the apostles at Pentecost, equipped them for their mission, led to the creative assembling of the NT church, and still inspires and empowers the Christian community so created.

So, this we do proclaim and affirm. Or, is all this just church stuff, and not part of the day to day?

Is the Spirit moving us / pulling us, leading us?

Do we possess the answer..... or does the answer possess us?

All people long to be truly alive—this is the groaning from the heart.

Yet, good words, a nice religion with bold promises are not enough

And to be sure, this assembly from dry bones / this ascent from the valley of dullness and despair is not something we construct or enable.

We can't handle putting together the broken pieces of our own lives, even though we waste a lot of energy trying.

Trusting God, being open to God's Spirit is not easy.

Surrender is not easy, but surrender is the door to faith.

Moreover, as the story about Bob attempted to reveal:

The world doesn't need people or a church who celebrate life and love.

The world, ... each of us need.....to be alive / to be the love.

Redemption is but a breath away, but we have to release the old breath, first

May we let go,.... and Breathe deeply.... God's Spirit is near.

And, God only knows where we'll go from here. ????