

CAN THESE BONES?

5/20/18 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA

Pentecost (B): Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 104: 25-35,37; Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Who here knows the St. Andrew's mission statement by heart? I'll be honest, I'm still working on it, but it's right there on the cover of your bulletin. If you'll humor me, let's read it out loud together: "To reveal God's love by nourishing the community through worship, acceptance, and service." So, when someone asks, "What do you do at St. Andrew's?", you can say: "We reveal God's love by nourishing the community through worship, acceptance, and service."

Now, it's pretty clear to me that our mission statement is about a lot more than just "growing a business", but I realize there's still the notion among some people that a mission statement is for a business, not a church; and that, as a church, we shouldn't be concerned with things like mission statements and strategic plans.

But a mission statement also encapsulates, and reminds us, of our values as a community. I won't ask you to recite those, but the values we identified as core to who we are as a parish include:

- We are an open and welcoming community.
- We love and serve our neighbors together.
- We care for each other as family.
- We joyfully live out our faith, grounded in the Gospel.
- And, we celebrate the journey!

I was pleased with them when we first identified those values, because I think they really do describe us, but last Sunday I was extra proud when Bishop Katharine commented how impressed she was by seeing them listed on our website. It was apparent she had done her homework before visiting us, so her compliments on all the hard work we've done in asking: "What's it means to be church in the 21st century?", were especially meaningful to those of us who met with her.

But even before the bishop mentioned our core values, I had been thinking about them in relation to Pentecost, ever since I read an article from a podcast called "Can These Bones". I can't remember where I came across the report, but, of course, with a title like "Can These Bones" it caught my attention because I knew we'd be reading about "dem bones" in the Ezekiel passage this morning.

As I read the interview with the Executive Vice President of Jet Blue Airlines, I got really excited about how the mission statement of a company in the for-profit world was so similar to ours in the not-for-profit world. The Jet Blue mission statement is not exactly the same as ours, by any means, but it is about making a difference in the world.

The Jet Blue mission statement is boiled down to two words: Inspiring Humanity. And the airlines very consciously intend the double meaning: both "inspiring humanity", as in their actions inspire the rest of the world, and also "inspiring humanity" in terms of taking actions that inspire others to do things that are humane, just, true, and respectful... "inspiring humanity".

In that article, the Jet Blue executive talked about how not only do all the employees—from the cleaning crew to the cabin crew—have the company’s core values memorized, they are empowered to take actions that might go against protocol, if those actions would better live into the company’s values. So, for instance, after the shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando a few years back, Jet Blue offered free travel for families of victims, back and forth from Puerto Rico to Orlando. So while increasing the company’s bottom-line it is surely a desired outcome, it is not one of their core values.

When we identified the core values of St. Andrew’s, we were coached to think about what we would keep doing as a parish—as the body of Christ—even if we received negative criticism for doing so. Jesus might not have ever mentioned the words “core values”, but he certainly embodied and modeled for us the kinds of risks one ought to take when living into “kingdom values”.

Even though his actions did not win Jesus popularity contests with those in charge, he healed people on the Sabbath, he sat with the other, he insisted that people in his company care for each other—even if they were strangers to each other, because, like Jet Blue employees, Jesus had been empowered to take risks in order to better live into the values of God that would inspire humanity.

The Ezekiel story we read this morning reminds us that sometimes—although the values were there all along, we require new life to be breathed into us. So that breath might be a reclaiming of sorts. It’s not that we’ve been doing church wrong, but the fabric of our culture continues to change, so we dig down deep and we find the points at which more people can access Christ’s message, and we breathe new life into the bones of our parish.

Lately life is being breathed into a national movement called: “Reclaiming Jesus”. The founding group is a couple dozen clergy from a number of different denominations—from Baptists to Methodists to Episcopalians—including Michael Curry, our current Presiding Bishop. The preamble to the joint statement of faith they created on Ash Wednesday quotes Martin Luther King Jr., who said: “The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state.”

The statement includes six affirmations, each of which is counterbalanced by a rejection. I’ll highlight a couple of them that follow the thread of our core values:

- We believe each human being is made in God’s image and likeness. Therefore, we reject the resurgence of white nationalism and racism in our nation.
- We believe how we treat the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner is how we treat Christ himself. Therefore, we reject the language and policies of political leaders who would debase and abandon the most vulnerable children of God.

If you want to read all of them—and I encourage you to do so—you’ll find them in a post on the St. Andrew’s Facebook page, or on the group’s website: reclaimingJesus.org. One of our vestry members was so moved by the statement that she’s traveling to D.C. to be a part of a prayer vigil the Reclaiming Jesus group is holding outside the Whitehouse this coming Thursday!

I think that sort of stirring—that feeling that “I have to be a part of this!”—is what the sense of “astonishment” must have been for the people gathered on that day of Pentecost. It’s way more than that they heard their own language being spoken. That kind of astonishment

comes in the recognition that the thing that's happening is so much larger than us, and that we are included in it. That's the whole point of Pentecost...to alert us, to remind us, to blow through us with a Holy wind that God's values—God's love—is for everyone...no matter the language they speak!

Which is included in a couple of our core values:

- We are an open and welcoming community.
- We love and serve our neighbors together.

And because we have been so committed to living out those values here at St. Andrew's, we have been experiencing even more life in our bones! Last week about 40 of you gathered at the 8am service, and 235 of you at the 10am, to celebrate the confirmation of nine youth and two adults, the reception of three adults, and the renewal of another person. Two weekends ago we married Kate and Christine, and today we're baptizing two children. Those are the marks of a healthy and vital parish, and we're vital because we don't just espouse our core values, we live them.

Just as Jet Blue has claimed they are about more than simply airplanes, they're about making a difference in the world, we are not just about this building, we are BEING church out in the world—sharing kingdom values with all we encounter. Thanks be to God!

-AMEN

Collect of the Day:

Almighty God, on this day you opened the way of eternal life to every race and nation by the promised gift of your Holy Spirit: Shed abroad this gift throughout the world by the preaching of the Gospel, that it may reach to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy 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."

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, "Prophecy 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 are 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.

Psalm 104:25-35,37

O LORD, how manifold are your works! * in wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Yonder is the great and wide sea with its living things too many to number, * creatures both small and great.

There move the ships, and there is that Leviathan, * which you have made for the sport of it. All of them look to you * to give them their food in due season.

You give it to them; they gather it; * you open your hand, and they are filled with good things. You hide your face, and they are terrified; * you take away their breath, and they die and return to their dust.

You send forth your Spirit, and they are created; * and so you renew the face of the earth. May the glory of the LORD endure for ever; * may the LORD rejoice in all his works.

He looks at the earth and it trembles; * he touches the mountains and they smoke. I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; * I will praise my God while I have my being.

May these words of mine please him; * I will rejoice in the LORD. Bless the LORD, O my soul. * Hallelujah!

Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, 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, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs-- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' "

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

Jesus said to his disciples, "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But, now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 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. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."