

Lent 2011 at Brentwood Presbyterian

The Life-Giving Spirit

April 10, 2011

**Psalm 130 & Ezekiel 37:1-14
(Hymns –90, 476, 171, 768)**

On Tuesday this past week, the Presbytery of Westminster considered a recommendation from the Ministry Committee that I be re-appointed here at Brentwood for an additional two years, from December 2011 through to November 2013.

There seemed to be some confusion about the title under which I could be re-appointed, so the decision is put off until next month, but we sense that the re-appointment will be made.

There was some interesting language, however, in the recommendation presented by the Ministry Committee. It described Brentwood as a congregation that was “apparently at death’s door.” I suspect that reflected more how some in presbytery saw you rather than how you understood yourselves. The report did go on to acknowledge that the congregation now was “demonstrating hope,” and went on to say the following:

[The developing viability of the congregation] will require continued skilled planning and a ministry defined by a welcoming attitude coupled with outstanding music for congregation worship and community enjoyment. It is likely that this is a task that will require an additional five to seven years of committed and creative hard work.

So, we no longer look like a valley of dry bones to the presbytery. They are seeing signs that these bones can come back to life. And I very much want to continue to be part of that renewal of flourishing in the grace of Jesus Christ here at Brentwood Presbyterian. We’re confident that will be made possible at the next presbytery meeting in early May.

Ezekiel's prophesy of the dry bones
is about the revival of the people of God in an earlier time.
It's part of three chapters – 36, 37, and 38 –
that deal with the restoration of Israel's prosperity and faithfulness.
Ezekiel is a priest and prophet to the exiled Jews in Babylon
from about 593 to 563.
He constantly assured his hearers that God was with them
and active in their midst,
so that both Israel and the surrounding world
would know that God is the Lord.
To a helpless and hopeless people,
he brought hope of restoration.

The bones represent the exiles,
who have given up hope.

Throughout the passage,
there is a delightful word-play in Hebrew
with *ruah*, the Hebrew word meaning
spirit, breath, and wind.
It is the same Spirit that moved across the waters at creation,
came into man and woman
when they were created in the image of God,
was with Israel throughout the long exodus from Egypt,
and guided them in becoming a people God
chosen to bless the whole of creation.

Two things strike me as particularly relevant in this passage
for the people of God here at Brentwood.

First, Ezekiel acknowledges that only God can determine
whether the bones will live or not.

Second, the essential impact of this revival
is knowing that God is God,
that God is the Lord.

So, this whole prophesy is about God and God's intent.
We receive life through the work of the Spirit
in order to know that God is God
and will always be faithful to his covenant promise to be our God
as we respond positively to the invitation to be his people.

There is only one healthy dependency in this life,
and that is our dependency on God.

Human beings were created to flourish in relationship with God.
We find the ultimate satisfaction
of our needs
for security and safety,
for esteem and affection,
for power and control,
in a deep, personal relationship with
the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
the God of the Exodus,
the God of the prophets,
and the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

That is the Christian belief,
the heart of the Christian faith,
the source of Christian flourishing.

Any renewal of life must flow
from a deep appreciation of the gifts of the life-giving Spirit,
from a deep realization that God is with us and for us,
and blossom in an overwhelming gratitude for such grace.

The bones will be filled and covered with the stuff of life
when they know God is present and powerful,
when they align their energy with the purpose of that God,
and when they seek first and foremost the kingdom of that God.

That's what we must be about here at Brentwood
if we are to continue to increase our viability
in God's service.

We must seek to introduce people to
and nourish people in the grace of Jesus Christ.

They, like us, will experience God's life-giving Spirit
in the genuineness of the welcome they receive,
in the care and compassion that follows,
in the respect that is offered,
in the learning that happens,
and in the joy and contentment that embraces.

May we faithfully offer this life here at Brentwood long into the future.