Pentecost Sunday 2021 St. Clement’s, No Van

I was looking for a metaphor to describe what life here at St. Clement’s must feel like, and I just kept coming back to a rollercoaster. The metaphor works equally well for what life during the pandemic has been like:

Up and down, and up and down. Sometime a long, slow rise but almost always a steep drop. Up and drop, up and drop. When will it level out, and when will we get to our destination?

I know that you’ve been using only two of the readings most of the time during these church by-broad-cast-only months, but there is just something about today’s readings that couldn’t let me do it. It’s Pentecost, so we have to read the story about the coming of the Spirit on the folks in the upper room. It’s a “high” Holy Day in the church calendar and it just didn’t seem right not to celebrate the Holy Eucharist - that means we have to read the Gospel. And, well, that reading from Ezekiel just seemed to have something to say to us. So, three readings, drop the Psalm.

We love to imagine this reading about the dry bones in the valley and their reanimation; from scattered bones to skeleton to sinew and muscle, to fully fleshed but lifeless bodies. The only way life can come in to these long-dead warriors is by the animating and inspiring breath of Gd. Ezekiel sees it and hears that the Power that can do such a thing is going to reanimate defeated Israel, bring the exiles back to the Promised Land and raise them up from their defeat and humiliation.

That’s the kind of message we’d like the Spirit to share with us right now – that despite the ups and downs of the crazy roller-coaster ride, the end of the journey is just ahead and Gd is ready to raise us up.

Then the story of Pentecost in the Book of Acts. This year I noticed something new – that both Ezekiel and Acts are stories of things being reanimated, transformed and empowered. Both times it is only by the Spirit of Gd that this can happen, to dry bones scattered on a valley floor, and to a group of people who have ridden the rollercoaster of the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of the most important person in their lives, a rollercoaster of disbelief, dismay and grief, followed by amazement, wonder and hope.

That was then. This is now. What is the Spirit saying to the Church – to the Church in this beautiful province, to St. Clement’s church in this beautiful area of the metropolitan region? I believe it is saying, “Gd is doing a new thing here.” We’re back at the beginning but somehow we are in a new place with new tasks before us.

The Gospel of John is rich with teaching about the Paraclete – a Greek word with many more meanings that include Counselor, Advocate, Guide, and Teacher. Scholars encourage us to use the word “Paraclete” and teach about its multiple meanings, so that when we hear about the Spirit in John’s Gospel we do not limit its meaning or power.

And to pay attention: the work of the Paraclete is described differently in John’s Gospel from the other Gospels and the letters of Paul. In those the Spirit moves among the members of the church for the good of the church, but manifested in individuals. In John the Paraclete is entirely about the community of believers and about manifesting Jesus among that community, the life-giving sap that runs through the vine and the branches, connecting and feeding, helping the community to bear the fruit of love.

That is, in a nutshell, who we are and what Pentecost is about: we are those who believe Gd has been revealed to us really and truly in Jesus from Nazareth over two thousand years ago. We live to abide in Christ Jesus, and we remember – not as often as is good for us – that the Holy One who abided in Jesus abides in us. We have one task, and that is to bear the fruit of love. Love-in-action, love without favourites, love without end.

What is the Spirit saying to the Church? It is telling us that something new is beginning, something full of the grace and energy of love. It is reminding us that this doesn’t happen because we of us, but because Gd’s power moves among us to accomplish what Love sets out to do. Pentecost is about the power of Gd to raise us up and animate us, to breathe life into dry and worn-out spaces, dead spaces, and to transform weary wanderers into a Spirit-endued people ready to do whatever it is Gd leads them to do, trusting that it Gd who is at work among them – among us – to do more than we can ask or imagine. AMEN.