

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
May 24, 2015
Pentecost Sunday**

**Acts 2:1-21/Ezekiel 37:1-14
Up to the Challenge?**

Hymns: 176 – 179 – 187

Distribution: 573, 309

Closing: 183

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

“There’s no way!” I know you’ve thought it before. There’s that person that you know; that person that you know needs to hear about Jesus; that person that you’ve considered inviting to church. And though you’ve thought about how much of a difference Jesus could make in that person’s life; and you’ve thought about how cool it would be to have them sitting right next to you in that pew; another thought always enters and gets in the way: “There’s no way!”

Today, on this Pentecost Sunday, this day that celebrates the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, we are told to put away those doubts and excuses that hold back our witnessing and that lead us to say, “There’s no way!” And we are told that by two amazing Bible stories that definitively show us that the Holy Spirit is always up to the challenge of changing hearts and working life-saving faith.

If ever there were a time for a child of God to question the point of even speaking the Word of God, it is found in Ezekiel 37, our first reading on this Pentecost Sunday. In that famous lesson, the prophet Ezekiel was brought by the Spirit of the Lord and set in the midst of a valley full of bones. In that valley of death, Ezekiel was presented with a question: **“Son of man,”** God asked him, **“can these bones live?”** (Ezekiel 37:3)

Now, if ever there were a time to say with assurance, “There’s no way!” this had to be it, didn’t it? Littered before Ezekiel was dead bodies; and not even bodies, the prophet tells us that these were very dry bones. Life had long been gone from this valley.

But in a place where there was no way, the Spirit made a request of his prophet Ezekiel. **“Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!’”** (Ezekiel 37:4)

In a place where there was no life, in a place where there was no way, the request was simple, wasn’t it? Preach the Word of the LORD, God asked. And though it might’ve seemed pointless to Ezekiel, though it might’ve seemed like he was wasting his time and wasting his words; Ezekiel prophesied as he was commanded. He spoke the Word of God even when there was no way it would work.

And then it happened. *“And as I was prophesying,” Ezekiel tells us, “there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them...and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army.”* (Ezekiel 37:7-8, 10) Ezekiel preached the Word as the Spirit commanded. As the Spirit used that Word to bring life where there was once death, Ezekiel learned in a miraculous way that the Spirit was up to the challenge!

It happened again 50 days after Jesus rose from the dead, and just 10 days after he had ascended into heaven. On that day, during the feast of Pentecost, in Jerusalem, God wanted his apostles to start spreading the Word even though everything about the situation screamed, “There’s no way!”

Pentecost was a Jewish festival, a big Jewish festival, on which thousands of Jews gathered from all around the known world to celebrate. Keep in mind, these weren’t Jews who were wrestling with doubts or looking around for answers; these were devout Jews who were willing to pilgrimage for their beliefs.

And to this unlikely audience, these 12 apostles (who were themselves borderline fugitives) were to go and proclaim that a man who had just been crucified 7 weeks earlier was their Messiah. Because of this Messiah, they should leave behind their festivals and sacrifices and way of life – in other words, leave behind what had brought them to Jerusalem. They should do this because the Jesus that had been rejected as a fraud by the people of Jerusalem and the Jewish leaders had been proven to be the Son of God by being raised from the dead – though the apostles couldn’t prove it because Jesus was gone to heaven.

If the challenge weren’t great enough, there was one more thing that made success seem impossible: all these people that gathered spoke different languages and the disciples were Galileans who all shared the same native tongue.

As those 12 men gathered in a Jerusalem home, how could they not be thinking, “There’s no way!”

But in a place where Jesus had just been put to death, in a climate where the enemies of Jesus were willing to do anything to stop him, to people who had already said, “No!” in the strongest way possible,

Jesus had asked his disciples to be his witnesses in this place.

And then it happened, ***“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”*** (Acts 2:2-4)

The apostles preached the Word as Jesus asked and the Spirit enabled, and what happened? ***“Those who accepted the message were baptized, and about 3,000 were added to their number that day.”*** The early church learned in a miraculous way that the Spirit was up to the challenge!

Two situations where there was no way, two situations where God asked his people to preach, two situations where the Spirit was up to the challenge. And you know where we are going next, don't you?

Let's go back to that time, to that person, about whom who said, “There's no way!” Think about that person once more for a moment: What was it about that person's life that made you think that it couldn't or wouldn't change? What was it about that person that made you dismiss the idea that the Spirit would work in their heart? What led you to say, “There's no way!” as you dismissed them as being open to the idea of coming to church or hearing you tell them about Jesus? Whatever reason that you've had, however viable that reason might seem, can you really ever say, “There's no way!” to the Spirit that gave life to dead bones? Can you really ever say, “There's no way!” to the Spirit that changed all those hearts in Jerusalem?

So often, we are filled with doubts about the Spirit's ability to meet the challenge. Too often, we come up with excuses as to why the Spirit could never be up to the challenge in this situation. And we use those doubts and excuses to keep ourselves from doing what God has asked us to do. Rest assured, the Holy Spirit does not need our excuses or our well-thought out reasons as to why he can't succeed.

But the Holy Spirit does need one thing from us. It is the same thing that he needed from his prophet Ezekiel; it's the same thing he needed from the Apostles in Jerusalem. To give life and change hearts, the Holy Spirit needs us to share the Word. He needs us to put away those doubts and excuses that lead us to say, “There's no way!” In their place, he gives us courage and confidence to say, “Jesus died for you and he is the answer that you need.”

And when we deliver the message, when we give a simple invitation, when we allow the Spirit to work, then we will see what Ezekiel saw in that Valley of Bones; then we will witness with awe what Peter and

the Apostles experienced in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit brings life to those who are dead in their sins. The Holy Spirit changes hearts that are dark. The Holy Spirit is most definitely up to the challenge. May we share the Word with every person that we meet with this assurance: With the Holy Spirit, there's always a way! Amen.