

Crown Terrace Methodist Church

A message for Whitsuntide 2015

Dear Friends,

Sometimes a faintheartedness can creep over us as to the possibility of spiritual awakening. Now if any book is fitted to correct this tendency that book is the Bible, and a signal illustration is found in the story of Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones (chapter 37). Note God got his hand upon a man, 'The hand of the Lord was upon me'. In his book 'Power through Prayer', E.M. Bounds wrote, 'The church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men', and I daresay women! So what kind of people is God looking for?

Firstly, they are people of vision; they see things the way God sees them. John Wesley, of whom it is said 'the flame fell on a well-laid fire', once wrote, 'Stand upon the edge of this world, ready to take wing; having your feet on the earth, eyes and heart in heaven.' Clearly Ezekiel was a man of vision, 'The Lord [...] set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about.' That was the vision that moved him to action. It is a truth that where we are will determine what we see. For example, a person in a valley will see something, but not what a person on a mountain sees. We need to be a people of a higher altitude: like Ezekiel we need spiritual vision, 'The Lord carried me out in the Spirit'.

Secondly, they have a Word from the Lord. And I don't mean a word that has no power in it. Sometime ago, shortly after electricity was installed on the Isle of Skye, the good lady of the house was showing her guest around. She mentioned the various electrical appliances that were installed – refrigerator, cooker, and so on. But on this particular day a bag of peat would have been of more value, as there was no electrical supply owing to the fact that during a storm on the previous night the electric

cable had been damaged by the anchor of a ship. She had pamphlets telling her how to use the cooker, full of theory, but lacking in power. Can this be true of us in the church of Jesus Christ today, that in theory we accept the truth of the power of the Holy Spirit, but somehow the power may not necessarily be evident? Jesus said to his disciples 'Wait in Jerusalem until you have been endued with power from on high'. And when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, the promise was fulfilled and the power came down. The Aberdonian Oswald Chambers memorably once said, 'Pentecost did not teach the disciples anything; it made them the incarnation of what they preached.'

Thirdly, they have an awareness of the divine; they 'practice the presence of God' (Brother Laurence). In his journal Jonathan Edwards wrote, 'I rode out into the wood and in a retired place dismounted. There I had a view of the glory of the Son of God—a view that continued for about an hour, which kept me for the greater part in tears. I felt an urgency of soul to be emptied, to lie at His feet; to be filled with Christ and Christ alone.' No wonder God used Edwards in spiritual awakening. D.L. Moody once exhorted, 'O that we may be ambassadors of heaven in the courts of time who pervade the courts of time with the atmosphere of eternity.'

For Ezekiel, to begin with there was much activity amongst the bones, 'a noise and a shaking', scattered bones becoming noisy skeletons. There was much movement yet no life. What if all our endeavours produced nothing but articulate skeletons? But Ezekiel was a man whom God could trust. He could command the four winds to breathe on the skeletons because he was obedient to God, suggesting that if we obey the law of the Spirit, the power of the Spirit will obey us. May our Church be in the place of blessing, in the place of revival!

John