

Empowering a Church in Transition

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*The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple,
the church is not a resting place, the church is a people.*

*I am the church. You are the church. We are the church together.
All who follow Jesus, all around the world, yes, we're the church together.*

The church of Jesus Christ moves from one stage of life to another. In times of great effectiveness and witness, the church thrives by giving people hope. In times of struggle and conflict, the church limps along with weakened life and purpose. In the in-between times of life, the church begins to reflect and restore its mission and determination. Whichever way a church seeks to move, God's Spirit is there to restore and empower the core value of its existence.

The reading from the Gospel of John reassures Jesus' disciples that we are not alone in this journey of faith and witness. He is speaking to the first disciples about their fears as to what to do next. The Lord said, **6.....sorrow has filled your hearts. 7nevertheless 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.** This Advocate comes to them only after he is gone. The Spirit is to take them into the future as they minister in his name.

Jesus assures those of what the Advocate, the Spirit, is to fulfill in people's lives and in the world. He said, **8And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9about sin, because they do not believe in me; 10about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; 11about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.**

The Lord also affirms the purpose of the Spirit within the future church. He said, **13When 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. 14He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.**

The Lord speaks to us today as this church is becoming empowered and re-energized by the Spirit. What this means is that we seek to be led in the way of Jesus through the Spirit's presence in our lives. The ministry and mission of the Lord's disciples re-energizes the future of Christ's Church.

*We're many kinds of people, with many kinds of faces,
all colors and all ages, too, from all times and places.*

*I am the church. You are the church. We are the church together.
All who follow Jesus, all around the world, yes, we're the church together.*

As the song says, “We are the church together.” The church of Jesus Christ is all about people, about you and me, which truly makes the church a powerful witness to the ministry of the Lord.

The church of Jesus Christ is made up of millions of Christians throughout the world. Church life is lived according to the cultural of the people; language, worship style, song, clapping, dancing, music and preaching style vary across the globe. Each style of worship is appreciated wherever and however Christ’s church breathes.

What empowers the church is the Spirit of God that Christ breathed upon the first disciples at Pentecost. You and I also have been blessed with the Spirit of God as we live out our faith life within this congregation. Each one of us here today is responsible for what happens to the ministry and mission of this church.

The pastoral staff cannot do everything and should not do everything for you. The days of the missional driven church are upon you while the days of staff driven church and consumer church are heading to bookshelves to begin collecting dust.

Friends, sometimes the church has to be reminded of why we are here and for whom it exists. The questions for you today are: Why are you here? Why does this church exist? We each have an idea and a reason for being here. So really, why are you here? All of us have to answer these questions whether we are full-time or part-time residents. None of us are off the hook regardless where we consider our church home.

The most basic core value for the why we are here is this. We are here because Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior and we serve him with our lives.

The who for the existence of our faith and this congregation is to fully realize that we are the children of God as we continually grow and mature. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, lives in us and re-energizes us to serve the Lord.

The Apostle Paul proclaims the truth of the church when he writes in Second Corinthians 12 verses 12-13 **¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.**

Each member of a church, each one of you, has a purpose and a place in God’s plan and in this church. The affirmation and empowerment of the church is recognized by who we are and where we find a place to give of ourselves, and a purpose to serve Christ. Paul writes, **²⁷Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.**”

*And when the people gather, there's singing and there's praying,
there's laughing and there's crying sometimes, all of it saying:*

*I am the church. You are the church. We are the church together.
All who follow Jesus, all around the world, yes, we're the church together.*

The prophecy of Ezekiel 37 gives a person and a faith community the necessary vision of restoration and renewal. The vision of the dry bones in Ezekiel gives a people hope in what God has intended for them as well as for us.

The Prophet Ezekiel gives the Jews, who were scattered abroad because of war and deportation, a vision of God's Spirit restoring and resurrecting them to a faithful relationship and to hope.

God took Ezekiel to the middle of a valley surrounded by dry and lifeless bones. There God asked, **"Mortal, can these bones live?"** And the prophet answered, **"O Lord God, you know."** God said, ⁴... **"Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. ⁵Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I 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."**

Just like the lifeless bones in the vision of Ezekiel, so too we must look at the inertness that sifts through this congregation.

God's call to bring renewal and restoration to the bones gave Ezekiel the power to proclaim new life to the people. He spoke out and **suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸I 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.** The very essence of the body returned but remained empty of the Spirit of God.

The Almighty knew what the people needed to be restored. **⁹Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, 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."** ¹⁰**I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.** The Spirit, the breath, of God filled the bodies with the life giving energy. The Hebrew word used here for "breath" is ruach which means spirit or soul.

God reassures the prophet that the bones belong to the faithful people. Then the bones will say, **'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely....¹³and you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people.**

The most profound proclamation is the one God gives where the Spirit will once again awaken and live within the people **¹⁴I 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."**

Friends, we too rely on God to put his Spirit within us. We may have broken relationships, voids in our lives, low spirits, a sense of despair, a floating feeling without a purpose or direction, or wondering how we are going to be renewed in our lives. Let me reassure you that God is with us and is watching over us. Yes, we want to see signs that this body of believers is regaining balance in worship, ministry and prayer life. I can see continuous steps forward taking place in the church. So keep the faith.

*Sometimes the church is marching, sometimes it's bravely burning,
sometimes it's riding, sometimes hiding, always it's learning.*

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All who follow Jesus, all around the world, yes, we're the church together.*

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, each one of us has a responsibility and a purpose to make this church a place where Christ's ministry and mission moves in the world. Each one of us is indispensable to Christ's church.

Now, if any one of you chooses to sit back and wait until the Transitional Pastor leaves or wait to see the new Pastor then I believe a disservice is being done to the church and harm is being done to the purpose of living out your faith. I believe the Spirit of God will change your heart from resentment, anger, prejudice and revenge to a fully committed heart, mind and soul to the empowerment of this church, Christ's church. So may we also find revitalization in our hearts and minds as we worship the one who sent his Son Jesus to give us life abundantly.

So rekindle your spirit anew if you feel out of step with God or do not feel God is present in your life. Each of us is called to renewal in God's Spirit and to re-engagement into the ministry of Jesus Christ. May the Spirit of God blow over you and through you as we seek to be faithful to God during this time of transition and renewal.

*At Pentecost some people received the Holy Spirit
and told the Good News through the world to all who would hear it.*

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May the Spirit of God move you to renew your sense of call to the ministry of Christ. Valley Presbyterian Church is on the move and you play an essential role in moving this church further into the future. Before we blame others for our situation, let us first look in the mirror. And remember: "Quit looking behind you, you're not heading that way." Why? Because...

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All who follow Jesus, all around the world, yes, we're the church together.*

Yes, we are the church empowered by the Spirit of God!

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Supporting Scriptures:

Ezekiel 37:1-14 (NRSV)

¹The 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. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I 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."

⁷So 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. ⁸I 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. ⁹Then 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." ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

¹¹Then 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.' ¹²Therefore 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. ¹³And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I 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."

John 16:4b-15 (NRSV) The Work of the Spirit

^{4b}"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' ⁶But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. ⁷Nevertheless 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. ⁸And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹about sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; ¹¹about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

¹²"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When 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. ¹⁴He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.