

**Sermon**

**“Be Okay With Crazy”**

June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019 ~ First Presbyterian Church

Day of Pentecost

Based on Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Acts 2:1-12

**SCRIPTURE:**

**Ezekiel 37:1-14**

<sup>1</sup>The Lord’s power overcame me, and while I was in the Lord’s spirit, he led me out and set me down in the middle of a certain valley. It was full of bones. <sup>2</sup>He led me through them all around, and I saw that there were a great many of them on the valley floor, and they were very dry. <sup>3</sup>He asked me, “Human one, can these bones live again?” I said, “Lord God, only you know.” <sup>4</sup>He said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, Dry bones, hear the Lord’s word!” <sup>5</sup>The Lord God proclaims to these bones: I am about to put breath in you, and you will live again. <sup>6</sup>I will put sinews on you, place flesh on you, and cover you with skin. When I put breath in you, and you come to life, you will know that I am the Lord.” <sup>7</sup>I prophesied just as I was commanded. There was a great noise as I was prophesying, then a great quaking, and the bones came together, bone by bone. <sup>8</sup>When I looked, suddenly there were sinews on them. The flesh appeared, and then they were covered over with skin. But there was still no breath in them. <sup>9</sup>He said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, human one! Say to the breath, The Lord God proclaims: Come from the four winds, breath! Breathe into these dead bodies and let them live.” <sup>10</sup>I prophesied just as he commanded me. When the breath entered them, they came to life and stood on their feet, an extraordinarily large company. <sup>11</sup>He said to me, “Human one, these bones are the entire house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely finished.’” <sup>12</sup>So now, prophesy and say to them, The Lord God proclaims: I’m opening your graves! I will raise you up from your graves, my people, and I will bring you to Israel’s fertile land. <sup>13</sup>You will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and raise you up from your graves, my people. <sup>14</sup>I will put my breath in you, and you will live. I will plant you on your fertile land, and you will know that I am the Lord. I’ve spoken, and I will do it. This is what the Lord says.”

[CEB]

**Acts 2:1-12**

<sup>1</sup>When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one

of them. <sup>4</sup>They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak. <sup>5</sup>There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages. <sup>7</sup>They were surprised and amazed, saying, “Look, aren’t all the people who are speaking Galileans, every one of them? <sup>8</sup>How then can each of us hear them speaking in our native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; as well as residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya bordering Cyrene; and visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!” <sup>12</sup>They were all surprised and bewildered. Some asked each other, “What does this mean?” [CEB]

**OPENING PRAYER:** Almighty God, by the power of your Holy Spirit, speak to us in the language of our hearts, that we may receive your Word with understanding and answer your call with confidence; and let all God’s people say ... Amen.

### Why Don’t Presbyterians Talk More About the Spirit?

I was recently asked a question once again—one that I’ve received numerous times over the years of my ministry—about why don’t Presbyterians talk more about the Holy Spirit? It’s a good question with a good amount of possible reasons as answers. But, I think it ultimately comes down to the fact that Presbyterian-flavored Christians have typically been known for our “intellectual” approach to faith ... meaning that it’s always been easier and more comfortable for us to talk about scripture and to do mission work and conduct committee meetings because they are more visible, tangible expressions of our faith. We have a better sense of control and a better handle on things like that. And, it seems that once the Holy Spirit gets too involved, things get more slippery and unsettling and less tangible, and denominations and churches that are historically more associated with “being on fire” with the Holy Spirit have been characterized as ... well ... crazy (for lack of a better word). I personally have stood in a “spirit-filled” church worship service, and I was quite certain that the people to my right and to my left were indeed out of their minds. I can clearly remember thinking that I was not okay with that kind of crazy.

### The Crazy Pentecost Story

But, what do I know? Maybe there is something to be said for expressions of faith that would seem more “spirit-filled” and more “spirit-led” than we

Presbyterians often give ourselves credit for. After all, the story of the first Pentecost that I read a short while ago is truly nothing short of crazy. The Pentecost story is all at once crazy, strange, beyond imagination, irrational, miraculous, unfathomable, unsettling, transformational, and it is Luke's only way to explain the existence of the church in this world—however unbelievable it may seem. It's really no surprise that we typically read this story at arm's length—glad for the miraculous birth of the church while maintaining our raised eyebrows at anything that would nudge us out of our comfort zones. I mean, in just the first four verses you've got 1) sounds from heaven (we're not likely to hear any sounds today except a child's noise or a honking horn passing by on the street), 2) howling and fierce wind (not likely to come and blow the doors open today), 3) individual flames of fire on top of each person's noggin, and then 4) the seemingly impossible ability to start speaking in a foreign language without even the slightest mention of Google Translator or Rosetta Stone or whatever. Indeed, the first four verses alone seem to cover crazy well enough.

### **God's Crazy Wind, Breath, and Spirit**

However, I'll tell you what's really crazy, and it's written about all throughout scripture—and it's that God's wind blows where it wills! God's wind—sometimes also described as God's breath and God's Spirit—blows where it wills ... as in Genesis, when the wind of God comes over the waters and breathes life into creation; as in Ezekiel, when the Spirit breathes new life into dry bones; and as in Acts, when Luke recognizes that the same breath that gives us life also gives life to the church, the body of Christ. And, that very point helps those in both the church and the world today who regard the Holy Spirit as an exotic phenomenon—people like me and maybe like you—to see and embrace the story of the Spirit's descent at Pentecost from a different perspective ... that just as it takes all parts and types of people to make up the body of Christ, so this story insists that this crazy, unsettling, transformational outpouring of God's Spirit is for everyone everywhere, no matter who they are or where they come from; that a new wind has been set loose upon the earth, provoking a storm of wrath and confusion for some (yes), but also a fresh breath of hope and empowerment for so many others! Because when God enters our world, especially through the wind and breath of the Holy Spirit, great things happen! And, that's exactly why we should be more okay with crazy (with God's kind of crazy) than we've ever been before.

## We Must Be Crazy

After all, we must already be crazy ourselves and out of *our* minds to think ...

... that a quiet and reserved sheep-herding refugee with low self-esteem could lead God's people out of Egypt, but Moses did that very thing with God's help;

We must be crazy and out of *our* minds to think ...

... that a Pharisee who was known for his brutality and ruthlessness to any Christ-follower who crossed his path could proclaim the gospel message louder and prouder and further than any other, but Saul became Paul and helped spread the gospel across the known world with God's help;

We must be crazy and out of *our* minds to think ...

... that the Peter who proved himself so capable of betrayal and who denied Jesus three times could do anything to redeem himself, but that same Peter became a bold and eloquent speaker for Christ with God's help;

We must be crazy and out of *our* minds to think ...

... that God is in the business of freeing slaves and breaking people out of bondage, but just read further into Acts or see instance after instance through history of people achieving their freedom in God's name;

We must be crazy and out of *our* minds to think ...

... that the church could grow at all under the watchful eye of Roman tyrants, but the early apostles and martyrs would not be silenced and 2,000 years later we are still worshipping the one God here in this place;

We must be crazy and out of *our* minds to think ...

... that we know better than God how the church will rise and fall, or expand and contract, but we proudly proclaim that Christ alone calls the church into being and is present with the church in both Word and Spirit;

We must be crazy and out of *our* minds to think ...

... that we can do anything in this world to make a difference in the lives of people who are hungry and cold and lost and alone, but we may soon open our doors multiple times a year for Family Promise, and we already contribute both our money and our time to the Community Food Pantry, Baby Love, Meals on Wheels, Thornwell Home for Children, and more;

We must be crazy and out of *our* minds to think ...

... that different types of people who might not normally agree on hardly

anything in this life can be part of the same community of faith, but this church and many others exist today for that very reason with God's help;

We must be crazy and out of *our* minds to think ...

... that God is really present in this whacky world, and in us, but everyday there are God-sightings everywhere and people experience the holy and the sacred in even the simplest interactions with friends and strangers and more...

Because God's wind blows where it wills, breathing new life in places that once seemed dry or stale, filling them with the power of God's Spirit. And, where the Spirit is present, God is present as well, doing one awesome crazy thing after another.

**So Be Okay With Crazy!**

My friends, God's wind does blow where it wills—yes, even among Presbyterians! All of our lives, we've been praying for it, we've been transformed by it, and we've been reaping the benefits of it, every single day. And, all of our lives, we've been reading the same Bible talk about the same kind of crazy—God's crazy wind and crazy breath and crazy Spirit—from the first moments of creation in Genesis to Pentecost and beyond. So from now on, I think we should be more okay with crazy ... with God's kind of crazy.

Thanks be to God for sending the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost! Amen.