

Congregational Church of the Messiah

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What Are You Made Of?

Ezekiel 37:1-14; 2 Corinthians 3:2-3

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God has great work for us to do here on earth as co-workers with Him.

God took the prophet Ezekiel in a vision to a valley of dry bones and challenged him asking, “Can these dry bones live again?” How would Ezekiel know? He had no idea so he answered, “O Lord God, You Know.” Perhaps he was saying, “I have no idea. They sure look dead to me, but You can do whatever you want to do with them. Only You know if they can live again.”

Then God told Ezekiel to prophesy to put flesh and shape on the bones. Then it was just form—still no life.

Finally, God told Ezekiel to prophesy again, and as he did so, the breath of God came into the bones; and they came to life, and stood on their feet, an exceeding great army.

(from Ezekiel 37:10)

God saw the problem. People were dead to God’s Spirit. God used Ezekiel to bring new life to people who had no real life in them.

God can use us to bring new life to those around us who live in our neighborhoods but are not yet filled with the Spirit of the Living God. There are people living all around us who are like those dry bones. They have no idea that the breath of God lives inside them and could bring them to a whole new level of living with joy instead of sorrow, with love instead of hatred, with power instead of weakness.

They try to figure out the world by themselves. They accept whatever their culture and their own thinking tells them. Often that reflects what Jesus called “the Way of the World,” or what Parker Palmer calls our “primitive brain.”

Our natural instinct tells us to look out for ourselves first. It is the “survival of the fittest.” When a crisis comes, we are to either “fight or flee.” The way to live is “me first. Everyone is on his or her own. I am not responsible for anything to God or anyone else.”

That point of view often leads to lashing out in violence or turning and running away from a situation, ignoring what needs to be changed, following the course of least resistance instead of making tough decisions and dealing with the crisis in a way that could lead to reconciliation.

How are we to live in the middle of a secular world in which people operate for

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themselves without thinking of others? What difference can one person make in the world for God? I received an E-mail this past week that has been circulating for years. I have no idea where or when it started, but it still has a clear message for us. The e-mail said:

One day, when I was a freshman in high school, I saw a kid from my class walking home from school. His name was Kyle. It looked like he was carrying all of his books. I thought to myself, "Why would anyone bring all of his books home on a Friday? He must really be a nerd."

I had quite a weekend planned (parties and a football game with my friends tomorrow afternoon), so I shrugged my shoulders and went on.

As I was walking, I saw a bunch of kids running toward him. They ran at him, knocking all his books out of his arms and tripping him so he landed in the dirt. His glasses went flying, and I saw them land in the grass about ten feet from him. He looked up, and I saw this terrible sadness in his eyes. My heart went out to him. I jogged over to him as he crawled around looking for his glasses, and I saw a tear in his eye.

As I handed his glasses to him, I said, "Those guys are jerks. They really should get lives."

He looked at me and said, "Hey thanks!" There was a big smile on his face. It was one of those smiles that showed real gratitude.

I helped him pick up his books and asked him where he lived.

As it turned out, he lived near me, so I asked him why I had never seen him before. He said he had gone to private school before now. I never would have hung out with a private school kid before.

We talked all the way home, and I carried some of his books. He turned out to be a pretty cool kid. I asked him if he wanted to play a little football with my friends. He said, "Yes."

We hung out all weekend, and the more I got to know Kyle, the more I liked him, and my friends thought the same of him.

Monday morning came, and there was Kyle with the huge stack of books again. I stopped him and said, "Boy, you are gonna really build some serious muscles with this pile of books everyday!" He just laughed and handed me half the books.

Over the next four years, Kyle and I became best friends.

When we were seniors, we began to think about college. Kyle decided on Georgetown, and I was going to

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Duke. I knew that we would always be friends, that the miles would never be a problem. He was going to be a doctor, and I was going for business on a football scholarship.

Kyle was valedictorian of our class. I teased him all the time about being a nerd.

He had to prepare a speech for graduation. I was so glad it wasn't me having to get up there and speak. Graduation day, I saw Kyle. He looked great.

He was one of those guys that really found himself during high school. He filled out and actually looked good in glasses. He had more dates than I had, and all the girls loved him.

Boy, sometimes I was jealous! Today was one of those days.

I could see that he was nervous about his speech. So, I slapped him on the back and said, "Hey, big guy, you'll be great!"

He looked at me with one of those looks (the really grateful one) and smiled, "Thanks," he said.

As he started his speech, he cleared his throat, and began, "Graduation is a time to thank those who helped you make it through those tough years: your parents, your teachers, your siblings, maybe a coach, but mostly your friends. I am here to tell all of you that being a friend to someone is the best gift you can give. I am going to tell you a story..."

I just looked at my friend with disbelief as he told the story of the first day we met.

He had planned to kill himself over the weekend. He talked of how he had cleaned out his locker so his mom wouldn't have to do it later and was carrying all his stuff home.

He looked hard at me and gave me a little smile.

"Thankfully, I was saved. My friend saved me from doing the unspeakable..."

I heard the gasp go through the crowd as this handsome, popular boy told us all about his weakest moment. I saw his mom and dad looking at me and smiling that same grateful smile.

Not until that moment did I realize its depth. Never underestimate the power of your actions. With one small gesture, you can change a person's life—for better or for worse.

God puts us all in each other's lives to impact one another in some way.

Look for God in others.

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The spiritual part of us was created to see the Spirit of God in the spirit of another human being. Every person who is aware of God's Spirit within has the ability to share joys and sorrows, the yearning to become what God created us to be, the deep longing for the home which awaits us in heaven where there is no more pain and suffering, where tears and sorrow are turned to joy for every believer in Jesus Christ.

Part of how we are made is to be healthy, to seek until our deepest needs are met.

God has designed the church to help meet our five deepest needs. According to Rick Warren they are

1. a purpose to live for,
2. people to live with,
3. principles to live by,
4. a profession to live out,
5. and power to live on.

He goes on to point out that "the difference between a church attender and a church member is commitment. Attenders are consumers; members are contributors. Attenders want the benefits of a church without sharing the responsibility"

He also states it is important to join a local church family because "it proves you are committed to your spiritual brothers and sisters in reality, not just in theory."

Rick Warren states: "God wants you to love real people, not ideal people. You can spend a lifetime searching for the perfect church, but you will never find it. You are called to love imperfect sinners, just as God does."¹

God creates persons like you and me for His awesome work of reconciling people to live together in peace. We are called to belong to one another, not just to believe.

We are made up of sinews and bones, but the mighty Lord God can fill dry bones with His Holy Spirit and then gives us great work to do here on earth.

This past summer there was an interview on National Public Radio, with Basim, an Iraqi, who worked as an interpreter for American troops. He took the job believing that the Americans represented hope for his country.

But when the treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib was made public, it showed Iraqis that Americans could be just as brutal as Sadaam's police. Then Basim's efforts to bridge the two cultures brought death threats against him and his family, and they were forced to leave their homeland.

¹ Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002, page 136-137.

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The interviewer asked, “Was it naïve to believe that you could stand in the middle like that?”

Without hesitation Basim answered, “No. It wasn’t at all.”

“If reconciliation is going to happen,” he said, “...there must be people who are willing to live in the tragic gap between people who differ and help the two sides understand each other.” (Parker Palmer, *Weavings* March/April 2009, page 7)

When Jesus sent out his disciples into the villages, He instructed them to preach saying, “the kingdom of heaven has come near you.” (Matthew 10:7)

When you think of someone you know that is headed in the wrong direction or being harassed by his or her friends to turn away from God, God may be calling you or me to respond in some loving way as the friend did for Kyle.

Sometimes it is only through prayer that we come to learn what God is calling us to do. Sometimes God is calling someone else to share his or her faith in some other way, and our task is to pray not to intercede except through earnest prayer.

No matter who you think you are—young or old, tall or short, poor or rich—you may be the one special person through whom God may choose to reach another person. Perhaps someone you thought would never be filled with the Spirit of the Almighty may be the very person God is calling you to pray for.

It is no secret what God can do. What He’s done for others he’ll do for you. God answers prayers in His own way and in His own time.

Today we live in a city full of dry bones, people who do not know the forgiveness, the joy of inner peace that comes in the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ.

God has not written his love and grace on tablets of stone but on your hearts. God has not painted His love on the walls and ceiling of your church but on your lives and in your relationships with one another.

You know what it’s like to be forgiven by God.

You know the blessing of being accepted by Christ.

You are learning what it means to be a fellow worker
with Christ in the world today.

What a wonderful time to be alive and serving God! What a magnificent challenge to be used by God, even as Ezekiel and Paul were, to bring Good News to people filled with “dry bones!”

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I close with these few lines:

- If you really care you can dare to share Christ's love knowing the Holy Spirit will be there.
- New life can begin again and again through Christ in you.
- So not underestimate God, the Eternal, all-powerful King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
- For what the world needs now is God's love always.

What the world needs now
is God's eternal love,
which we pass on to others because
the Grace God has already been given to us.

The living God has placed His Spirit
in our hearts and through Christ
we become His Living Word to others.

We are made with part of God's Spirit within us. Follow that leading of God within you and be part of His great work on earth today.

Amen.