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“These Bones Will Live”

By Rev. Edgar F. Solís

Introduction.

Have you ever used your fingerprint or face to unlock your smartphone? Do you rely on navigation technology in your vehicle to find the most efficient route to your destination? When you shop online, have you noticed how the retailer suggests products based on your past purchases? When you use spellcheck or autocomplete to write an email or text message, you're likely interacting with Artificial intelligence-enabled technology multiple times a day, whether you're aware of it or not.

Artificial intelligence, a technology that has emerged with unprecedented speed, is now a part of our daily lives. The rapid pace of AI's development and adoption has left our digital wisdom struggling to keep up. For Christians, this digital wisdom must encompass theology, our understanding of God and the world from a faith-based perspective. It's crucial that we integrate our theological beliefs with our digital wisdom, as this will shape our interactions with AI and the world it creates. Artificial Intelligence can be thought of as technology to create organic experiences. IBM defines Artificial Intelligence as technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human intelligence and problem-solving capabilities. This technology, if harnessed with the right intentions, could potentially enhance our spiritual understanding and deepen our connection with God. While we can harness AI to enhance our quality of life, we must also be aware of the potential risks it poses in the context of our faith. There is a danger of

substituting what is real and authentic for what is artificial or virtual in our relationship with God. This potential shift could impact our connection with the life that Christ can produce here and now in the reality of our human existence and the experience of our relationship with others.

The church today is living in a liminal time of definitions and challenges. These experiences only by the real presence and manifestations of God's presence can bring positive outcomes in transforming the world and establishing a new reality for everyone on earth. Pentecost wasn't a contrived or artificial experience for the first Christians! It was a profound and authentic experience of change and openness to the world! Pentecost symbolizes the reception of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church, marking a pivotal moment in the church's history.

Context Matters:

Before delving into the interpretation of the biblical passages, let's set the stage. In the book of Ezekiel 37:1-14, we encounter a fantastic narrative of dry bones, skeletons, then dead bodies, lifeless organisms or structures. This vision, which I initially associated with a parallelism with Artificial Intelligence, depicts a scene where these cadavers are in need of real life. This parallelism, which is not just a coincidence, invites us to consider the transformative power of God in the church, just as the breath of life transformed the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision. The passage from Ezekiel is set in the context of Israel's exile to Babylon in the sixth century BCE. The prophet's vision of a valley filled with the bones of the slain is not a literal depiction but a powerful symbol. It evokes the death-like experience of exile itself, and God's spirited revivification of those bones functions as a hopeful promise of renewal and restoration.

In the New Testament passage, the disciples are gathered anticipating the Festival of Weeks (Shavuot). Jesus had prophesied the arrival of the Holy Spirit, and true to his word, the Holy Spirit descends on the festival day itself. The scene is nothing short of spectacular and chaotic: a violent, rushing sound like wind, and then 'divided tongues, as of fire' — not a destructive fire, but a fire reminiscent of the one Moses encountered at the burning bush, a fire that blazed yet was not consumed. (Exodus 3).

Pastoral reflection

The Spirit's most immediate, distinct effect is linguistic: many are empowered "to speak in other languages," and at the same time, each person gathered hears the testimony in their native language. This is akin to a meeting at the United Nations, where each person hears (through a headset) the proceedings translated into their mother tongue.

The Holy Spirit's intervention creates a profound sense of togetherness and unity: diverse as they are, everyone understands and can communicate. This is the power of the Holy Spirit, bridging gaps and fostering a deep sense of community. Accordingly, they're dazzled and taken aback, asking, "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:12) But now the Spirit will empower a community through whom the movement's message of healing, liberation, and joy will go out to the ends of the earth. The church is born, and with it, a new era of empowerment and mission! This is a testament to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, inspiring us to continue our faith journey with renewed vigor and dedication.

Conclusion and application.

Dear siblings in Christ, as we celebrate the birth of the church, it's a fitting time to reflect on what “the church” truly is. This week’s passage paints a picture of the church as *a dynamic community of people following Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Our mission is clear: to carry out God’s mission of healing, liberation, and joy for the sake of the world.* This is our calling, our purpose, and our inspiration.

This community is remarkably inclusive and egalitarian. The Jews Peter addresses are immigrants from all over the known world who now live in Jerusalem, and the Jesus movement will soon open up to include Gentiles as well. Accordingly, Luke casts the church as a diverse, prophetic community of bridge-builders, visionaries, and dreamers, male and female, enslaved and free — and soon enough, this equitable, communitarian ethos extends to the church’s social organization as well: “they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:43-47). And yes, this is a perfect week to reflect on how we understand the Holy Spirit. Luke’s portrait of the Spirit draws on ideas at least as ancient as Ezekiel’s vision, in which God’s “breath” or “spirit” — both *ru’ah* in Hebrew — brings life, renewal, connection, and restoration, sometimes in sudden, disruptive fashion. (Compare Ezekiel 37:7, Acts 2:2)). But for all the drama, Pentecost is only the beginning: throughout the Book of Acts, again and again, the Spirit mobilizes the church and opens up new horizons for ministry. Breath means new life — and new life means new growth, change, and ongoing development. The Spirit protects and connects but also challenges, provokes, and pushes us along. The church is not like Artificial intelligence, experiencing every week an Artificial Spirituality. The church is not a building, nor is it a particular membership or group of people. At its heart, the church is a mission, God’s mission — and the call, the challenge, the adventure continues. Let’s go, with hope and optimism for the future of the church and its mission! Amen!