

Breaking Away from Death to New Life
Homily – March 13th 2005, The Rev'd Colleen Spaeth – Deacon

When I read the readings for today, I accused Fr. Pat of deliberately prescreening the readings, and giving me the stuff he didn't want to address. I mean, after all, dry bones! A dead guy coming out of his tomb?! It's not even Easter yet, a time when we hear about the Resurrection, we're still in Lent, supposedly a season of honesty, sober reflection, confession of sin, even repentance.

So what are we doing with the long story of a dead guy being raised from the dead? I even expressed to Fr. Nat on Friday my loss for inspiration, pleaded with him to give me some ideas.

Of course, I was really turned around. I saw the story of death. I was making a very big story small, I was not thinking outside the box.

Fr. Pat shared his theology with me – a story of signs and wonders, a story of breaking away from death into new life. That sounded familiar to me, I remembered just a few weeks ago talking about new life the way to reach it.

Fr. Nat reminded me of the notion of turning toward death, a death to the things that separate us from new life in Christ, death of the need to control, death of our need for self justification, death to prejudice, death that paves the way to resurrection, into the light.

I think I was stuck in the idea of being angry a little bit with Jesus in this story. Here his good friend Lazarus is dying what does Jesus do? Does he hop on

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the nearest train and get there quick? Use a frequent flyer mile to fly to Bethany? Nope, he waits, and Mary and Martha wait, and Lazarus has been dead for a bit before Jesus and the gang get there. I didn't like the way Jesus handled himself in this story, I would have done it differently. And therein lies the problem.

I was looking at the death, I was focusing on what wasn't working while so much else was going on.

I was even mad at the faith of Mary and Martha. When Jesus finally shows up Martha meets up with Jesus and tells him, ... if you had been here all this wouldn't have happened. And Mary – she speaks with the same simple faith of her sister. What happens when Jesus goes to the tomb of his friend, he cries.

Then as only Jesus can do – he pushes his weight around, he intrudes, he has the stone pulled back, over the concerns of those watching, and he yells to his buddy – come on outta there Lazarus! I've got stuff for you to do, take off those clothes of death – come have life with me!

And so my confession – I believe I limit my God, I believe I can lock my God up, much as Lazarus was bound and locked in the tomb.

Now I believe a lot in my God, I believe in Jesus, a Jesus who forgives me, I believe in eternal life, sounds good to me, I believe in miracles, miracles everywhere every day, people are healed, made new, every day, no problem.

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I believe that God provides for me, watches over me and you, guards my steps. But for all my beliefs in God I still limit God – I still lock him up. There still continue to be places in my life often where I don't let God in.

Sometimes I travel to the valley of dry bones where Ezekiel went and I see as Ezekiel saw, as all of Israel saw, only dry old bones.

And that's when I need you. That's when I need others to say, come on down, Colleen, come on out of the dark, untie the stuff that binds you, take another look, celebrate the gift of the resurrection.

The story of the valley of the dry bones, the story of Lazarus being called from the grave, the story of a deacon being reminded that she too is being called to new life all the time. Jesus is the lord of both the living and the dead, he is the resurrection and the life, those who believe in him, though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in him will never die.

This is our faith, the one that we need to be reminded of occasionally, reminded of if we are not to fall back into despair, if we are not to dwell in anger and grief more than we ought, if we are not to prove to be both a pain to ourselves and to those around us.

At the conclusion of the story, Lazarus comes forth from the tomb, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped and Jesus tells the folk, unbind him and let him go. And it is the same with us maybe. We have been

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raised to new life with Christ, raised to a new life by virtue of our faith in God, we have a new chance to live life here as God wants us to live it, but to do so well, to live in the freedom God wants us to have, and we need to have the grave clothes that still bind us and the shrouds that still cover our faces – removed. We need to unbind the power of God in our lives, we need to let God come out of the tomb we place him in, we need to unwrap the wonderful reality that he has prepared for us.

Maybe every time someone suggests that perhaps you are limiting God, that you are locking God out of an area of your life, think of him or her as being one who is simply obeying Jesus as one who is trying to remove the things that bind the hands and the feet or your souls, and give thanks that God is not yet done with you, but is calling you and me onward, from death to life, from the restrictions of your tomb in which you once dwelt, to the light of a new day.

Only in this wonderful faith journey do we get all these chances to take a look at how we live our life and it is a good thing. One of my favorite theologians, the late Erma Bombeck in her once wrote,

“If I had my life to live over – I would have gone to bed when I was sick instead of pretending the earth would go into a holding pattern if I weren't there for the day.

I would have burned the pink candle sculpted like a rose before it melted in storage; I would have talked less and listened more; I would have

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invited friends over to dinner even if the carpet was stained, or the sofa faded.

I would have eaten the popcorn in the good living room and worried much less about the dirt when someone wanted to light a fire in the fireplace;

I would have taken the time to listen to my grandfather ramble about his youth; I would have shared more of the responsibility carried by my husband; I would never have insisted the car windows be rolled up on a summer day because my hair had just been teased and sprayed; I would have sat on the lawn with my grass stains.

I would have cried and laughed less while watching television and more while watching life; I would never have bought anything just because it was practical, wouldn't show soil, or was guaranteed to last a lifetime.

Instead of wishing away nine months of pregnancy, I'd have cherished every moment and realized that the wonderment growing inside me was the only chance in life assist God in a miracle.

When my kids kissed me impetuously, I would never had said, "Later. Now go get washed up for dinner." There would have been more "I love You's." More, I'm sorry's."

But mostly, given another shot at life, I would seize every minute, look at it and really see it, live it and never give it back. Stop sweating the small stuff, don't worry about who doesn't like you, who has more, or who's doing

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what. Instead, cherish the relationships we have with those who love us.

Think about what God has blessed us with, and what we are doing each day.”

And so God calls us – he’s yelling at us – COME OUT OF THE TOMB –

OUT OF THE DARKNESS – WITH EACH OTHER – INTO THE LIGHT.