

Pastor Roy's Sermon from April 6, 2014

Children's lesson

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Elijah sees a valley of dry humanly dead bones. An apostle thinks about the set of the mind. Jesus reveals to Mary and Martha and a crowd that death and resurrection are not exclusive, death is not the ultimate fear--or the final battle when there is faith.

In these 3 readings, we see contrasts. Faith vs. despair. Communion vs. alienation. Presence vs. distraction or absence. Being mindful vs. being reactive. Love vs. apathy. Love vs. greed. Love vs. fear. Love vs. distrust. These contrasts are based on our human experience. They are not reality; they are our understanding and interpretation of reality. They are what we do with reality. We have the power to push toward health or illness—to sow seeds of life or succumb to our own perceptions of mind and body and spirit.

The bones remind us of human life--the life of Israel—and us. Spirit and flesh. Flesh is more than our skin and bodies. Flesh is our mistrust of God even as we place too much trust in ourselves and our perceptions. Spirit is learning to trust the life of God which is profoundly much more than my life and your life. Flesh is despair, alienation, distraction, apathy, greed, fear, and distrust. Spirit is faith, communion, presence, mindfulness, and love in which we live in the Spirit.

The flesh is our self centered reading of reality, of life. The Spirit is the whole view. Whether we realize it or not, whether we like it or not, whether we embrace it or not, the Spirit has the say in this world. The flesh is the result of not spending enough time in the Spirit's presence. The flesh is the result of too much human perspective. When we are stuck on ourselves, our survival, our immortality, our needfulness. The Spirit is freedom from these things. Allowing God's creation, God's ways, God's mercy to be what it is. And it is.

Nothing can counter the Spirit. The Spirit of Christ is moving in creation. Working with humanity and working around us. The bones are dry. Despair, sorrow, hopelessness, perhaps anger and alienation. Can we cause the bones to come life? Can Ezekiel? No. Can the Spirit? Of course. Ezekiel is merely watching what the Spirit is doing. He speaks the words, yes, but it's not his work, it's the Spirit's work.

The Spirit is an unstoppable force at work in creation. For example, who can cause the power of death to have the final say? Yes, we feel the sting of death. We know the pain of separation and the loneliness of going on without family members, friends, spouse. We know the loss of memories, the loss of experiences, the way things were in the past. But these are not the death of life. These are the sorrows with which life confronts us, challenges to learn new mindsets, a new mindfulness of what God is doing in our world all around us. We are learning to listen to the voice of the Spirit.

To be mindful of the power of the resurrection of the life of God which knows nothing of death. This life of God follows up our losses, when we are ready, when we have grieved, when we have learned to hope again, yes, the Spirit of God follows up our losses with new opportunity, new life, new hope which will ultimately bring all things into communion with the Saints in light. God is at work to draw all of life back to God.

Nothing can get in the way of God. Nothing can stop resurrection. Nothing can stop life. Who can keep the dead from rising to new life, day by day, moment by moment—in both spirit and in the atoms of the body? Who can prevent Life? Who can prevent us from living the love of Christ Jesus our Lord? No one. Nothing. Not at all.

What is the problem then? We see the bones and we despair. We hear that Lazarus has died, and we fear that we will forever be lost, separated, broken. We feel the power of the flesh that drags us away from hope and peace and unity in the Spirit.

This is the last Sunday of Lent before Palm/Passion Sunday and Holy Week.

Lent has been an invitation to pray. An invitation to rediscover the amazing, beautiful, strong life of God which knows no limits. Which cannot be contained by our weakness. The life of God, the life of the Spirit is the big picture which we only find in prayer. Which we only find as we listen to the goodness and the mercy flowing around us. Herein is peace, and hope, and joy. We won't find it in any Thing else, or any other person, but only in the whole of God's life which takes an entire lifetime to unpack and discover.

Bones coming to life, the mind or mindfulness of the Spirit, the raising back to life of a dead man, Lazarus--these point us in the direction of resurrection and faith and hope found in finding stillness and listening to the Spirit in that quiet place.

Thanks be to God. Amen.