

Easter

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Holy Trinity Episcopal Church

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The story of Ezekial's encounter with God and bones begins like this:

“The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.”

God says to Ezekial, “can these bones live” and Ezekial says “oh Lord God you know! Now we don't exactly know just what the inflection was in Ezekial's answer. Was it said sort of in disgust...Oh Lord... God... you know. With his hands thrown up in the air? As if to say, honest to Pete, these bones are so dried up so desiccated, so hopelessly scattered that nothing and no one will ever bring them back to life. They are irretrievably past help, past healing, past hope. Was it said matter of factly...Oh Lord God, most powerful one, you know. As if to throw the question, back at the feet of the one who knows all and sees all and is all. As if to say, respectfully, of course, show me what you got God. Or was it maybe said with an air of hope, almost as a request, a prayer offered to the one who brings all things into life, Oh Lord God...you know. Perhaps the silence of the prayer utters, Oh Lord God you know, you know these bones, these are the bones of your children, the mighty house of Israel, bring them and me (I'm sure Ezekial prays) up out of this valley. Helps us in this place of desolation, heal us as our bones are broken, lead us with the hope of your salvation. We don't know all that Ezekial spoke to God in those five words, God does, but what ensues is a partnership between God and Ezekial in which the entire cohort is brought back to life. Not just put back together, although that happens; the bones come together with a great rattling, the sinews were stretched taught and the flesh came to cover them and finally finally God's breath came into them and they were brought back to life...God's life.

Now the first time we hear that story is some three weeks ago. Yes we actually hear it twice, well twice if you do as everyone ought and come to the Easter Vigil, the first time we hear it is the Sunday before Palm Sunday. We hear it in partnership with the story of the raising of Lazarus. We move on that Sunday from the story of God calling bones that have been dismembered and scattered all about a low and lonely valley into the light of life to Jesus the Son of God, God incarnate calling his friend who has lain in the grave for four days into the light of life. The progression, you see, to the light of the resurrection which we proclaim, no which we claim this night begins back there, with bone being called to return to bone, with the rolling away of a stone, with a voice saying “Lazarus come out.” Lazarus, come to life.

This life giving cry, this rendering of resurrection is too much, just too much. Jesus is no longer a problematic prophet but the Messiah; the long expected savior, the king, the liberator and the winds of change, the winds of life have begun to blow from Bethany to Calvary to Galilee and Halleluiahs of eternity begin to cover the howls of grief.

We know that Jesus travels from that empty tomb to Jerusalem where, for a short time, a tomb awaits him, as well. We know the path he takes strewn with betrayal and heartache, with loss and longing and with promise. Matthew tells us that after the Sabbath as the first day of the week was dawning, the women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. The Mary’s have crept out early in the morning probably as the light of this new day was just beginning to break to walk back into the valley of death, to go and see the tomb. Matthew doesn’t tell us clearly which Mary accompanies Mary Magdalene. Is it Mary the mother of Jesus? Is she going to stand just at the place where her son was placed, in attempt to make it real or perhaps not real? Is it Mary the wife of Clopas? Or is it perhaps Mary the sister of Lazarus, the one who has already experienced resurrection attempting to assure her friend the Magdalene that indeed Jesus lives?

And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

Again we have to wonder to whom is the angel speaking (I must say I always find it a bit interesting that the men shake in their shoes and become dumbstruck and leave the women with a stranger, angel or not.) for each of them would have heard the words a bit differently. Mary Magdalene, surely heard the words “Do not be afraid” on more than one occasions as she traveled with Jesus, if we believe as some do that Mary Magdalene was cured of demons by Jesus or that she was a prostitute, which by the way there is no scriptural evidence to support, and he lifted her from that life, then those words would bring very close the one whom she loved but would no longer see. If the other Mary is the mother of Jesus she too has heard those words before, from the very first the angel of the Lord assured her “do not be afraid.”

And once the women’s fear is calmed the angel says to them;

I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised,

He or she knows that they, like you and like me come to see if this one who has promised so much, who has offered so much, who is so much; truly is what he professes to be the Messiah, the promise of life everlasting. In Matthew’s account the angel does not ask “why do look for the living among the dead?” This angel seems to understand that we have little to no experience with resurrection and so of course would look in the last place we put him so to speak and so this angel gives the Mary’s and us another assurance:

He is not here; for he has been raised.

When I was in seminary one of my professors told all of us that if we got stuck on an Easter sermon there that all we needs to say was “He ain’t here.” He is not here, the angel assures the Mary’s, come and look see for yourself that the one who was crucified is not here. He has risen. Shortly as we gather around the table to celebrate the Lord’s Supper we will proclaim together

Christ has died

Christ is Risen

Christ will come again!

One of the first rectors I worked for and I had an ongoing debate about this phrase.

He would often ask somewhat rhetorically why do we say Christ is Risen? Christ's resurrection is an historical event he would say it happened once and that's it. To which I would respond yes, it is an historical event but it is also an active on going event that is present in our lives here and now and is about the future. He would shake his head and walk away muttering that I was an idealist or a romantic or something akin to that.

I believe that I was right (I know you're not surprised) but I also believe that the gospel we share from Matthew supports my position. The angel says to the Mary's

'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.'

The angel does not tell the Mary's to stay put, remain in place be static to experience the resurrection of our Lord, the angel tells them to run ahead and share the news with the disciples that Jesus, the Christ is alive and on the move and in fact going ahead of them to Galilee where he will meet them. Yes this event happened at a specific place and time but it is also happening in each of our lives right here and right now and more than that it is calling us to respond to it at some other place at some future time. Jesus has gone ahead of each and every one of us and is waiting to meet us....us!

So we are told the Mary's left the tomb that place of death and destruction and desolation, that place where bones wither away, that place without breath and run with fear and great joy to tell the disciples what they have learned and as they are running Jesus meets them. Jesus meets them on the road while they are in action, after they have left the place of death and run headlong into the places of life, Jesus comes to them and says:

"Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Do not be afraid, this time spoken by the one they love, the one they know, the Messiah, the Christ. Do not be afraid, as you run from the valley of death into the abundant life that God has breathed into you, do not be afraid as you run headlong into Galilee, the land of life, the land of promise for I will meet you there. Do not be afraid for if you look you will see me.

I do not know why you have come to peer into the tomb this year. Have you come hoping to find it empty or convinced that indeed all you will find is dry bones? Have you come convinced that this is a one-time event that has no current value or are you wishing to feel the jolt of an earthquake in your life? Are you wondering where you will find Christ or perhaps if Christ will find you?

I can assure you, just as the angel assured the Mary's

Do not be afraid.

Go to Galilee....to the land of the living and the Christ, the Messiah, will meet you!

Amen! Alleluia!