

Lent 5, Year A, April 6, 2014
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
Belvedere, CA
The Rev. Shari Young, preacher

*Out of the depths have I called to you O Lord;
Lord hear my voice;
let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.*

We are all on a journey of faith, and I have been recently reminded that here in church we are all in very different places. Some of us are deeply spiritual, some here for community, some for music, some searching, some for ethics and moral teaching, some because it's important to our partner and so on. What we all share, whether we know it or not, is that we are enfolded in God. We are all in the presence of God; we are all here because we have been called by God to be together whether we know it or not.

I saw the film "Son of God" recently, which was circulating in local theatres. For me on my journey, it was a good thing to do to get ready for Holy Week, which starts next Sunday with Palm Sunday.

I have dedicated my life to this story, and have certainly watched many movies of it, but this movie stirred me up rather than simply unfolding something very familiar. The paradox of a human being who is also divine; the authority of his teaching particularly on forgiving those who wrong us; the incredulity of his miracles; the complexity of the last week of his life; the depth of his suffering under torture.

If you are so inclined I recommend the watching of a Jesus movie during the next week or two. "Jesus of Nazareth" by Zefereilli is usually on TV at this time: visual images make the Jesus' story very vivid.

Today we hear the stories of the last Sunday in Lent pointing us to the conclusion of the story, the Resurrection to come in two weeks.

The Valley of Dry Bones is the compelling and bizarre vision, or mystical experience, of Ezekiel. He is surveying a scene of horror, the remnants of a long ago battle where bodies were not buried as the final revenge of the victor over the vanquished. Slowly as he prophesies, the bones move and rattle, and are rejoined, and the tissue restored and beings that were piles of bones, stand as human beings again.

This story is one of despair, not death. Ezekiel is speaking to the children of Israel who have been forcibly driven from their home into exile in Babylon. He is speaking God's word through metaphor to raise up his people from their hopelessness and a loss.

To this despair, Ezekiel offers a startlingly simple metaphor of divine presence, the ready availability of breath. Breathing becomes a metaphor for divine presence.

It is the breath that brings new life; the wind of the spirit, the “ruach” in Hebrew that revitalizes and transforms dessication into life. God’s ever-present gift of life is as near as the wind blowing our hair or as simply breathing.

Out of the depths have I called to you O Lord;

Lord hear my voice;

let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.

In John we hear the raising of Lazarus. Lazarus is dead, and has been in the tomb for four days. This is the event in Jesus’ life that finally drove the leaders over the top; to the condemnation of Jesus to death. It was just too much.

Jesus raises Lazarus by having the stone covering the tomb rolled away and entering and breathing on him. This powerful image is identical to Jesus own death and impossible resurrection to life.

But this is a story of dual meanings: The story of Jesus raising Lazarus is also the story of how Jesus can raise us.

+In the tomb of resentment, because of hurt or betrayal received from others;

+in a tomb of fear about the future and what it might hold;

+in a tomb of despair and discouragement about some difficult situation and how to handle it;

+in the tomb of a memory which haunts us and won’t go away.

The words of Martha to Mary, as they await Jesus are the words of Jesus to all of us, wherever we are on our journey: “The Master is here, and calls for you.”

Jesus is here and he calls for us. What places in our life are so frozen in fear, or resignation, or defeat that they seem thoroughly dead?

Out of the depths have I called to you O Lord;

Lord hear my voice;

let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.

Because God is present, our dead bones can breathe and come to life again. The doors of our tombs can have the stones rolled away and death can be transformed into life.

We are invited simply to breathe the life-giving breath of God; one breath at a time, and stand ready for the future, looking forward in hope.

We are invited to breathe in the presence of God, here community, nourished with bread and wine, our food for the journey, wherever we may be upon it.