

New Beginnings ~ April 10, 2011

Ezekiel 37:1-4; Romans 8:5-11; John 11:1-6, 17-27, 32-45, Psalm 130

Twelve years ago, when my mother was in the last days of her life, the scripture readings for this morning were the same. The Lectionary repeats every three years and if a pastor is wise and does not have a computer that crashes, he or she can simply rework old messages. Most of us find this difficult to do because we are at a different place in life every three years as are the congregations we serve.

At that time, 12 years ago, these readings brought me comfort. I would sit beside my mother in hospice and talk to her and feel confident that somehow her soul would journey on beyond that time and place. That didn't mean that her dear old bones would come together or that she would be called forth from the tomb to resume her life. It meant that somehow, her soul would journey on. She had been ready to die for many years, my father had died thirty years before she did, and she thought it was just about time she joined him. She peacefully slipped away from us one bright May morning with my sister and niece, my daughter and me beside her. I know that part of immortality is that we live on in the hearts of those we leave behind, and, so she does.

Ezekiel, on the other hand, heard the word of the Lord and was intent that those old dry bones in that valley would return to life. Israel would be restored to her former strength and vigor. His prophesy was correct and, eventually, Israel was restored. We can all imagine those bones clicking and clacking together and being wrapped in flesh and rising up to begin to claim the land that had been given them. A new beginning.

Jesus waited a while before he went to his friends and raised Lazarus from the dead. He wanted people to understand who he was and on whose behalf he was performing miracles. Through his life and teachings he always pointed beyond himself to God.

There have been many logical theories proposed for this story of Lazarus. Perhaps, some say, Lazarus was not really dead when he was tucked away in the tomb. Maybe he was just unconscious and he came to when Jesus called to him. He might have been in a coma, or something else might have made him appear dead. But, miracles ask us to set aside logic and reason and simply follow the story line. So, Lazarus was recalled to life and went on to enjoy a new beginning.

We are approaching Easter, the day that celebrates the resurrection of Christ. It is a day that marks a set of bones coming back to life, that recalls to our minds the story of Lazarus. It is a time of new beginnings, perhaps, even more than January first, the start of the new year.

We are all called to new beginnings in our lives. There are times when outside circumstances give us a good push. We might lose a job or a loved one or have a change in health. To resist these changes is futile. We are required to use our minds to figure out what it is we need to do next to regain our balance and then proceed from there.

Other times we might decide that we need to make a positive change on our own. These are the best times for us. We see opportunities and possibilities before us and might choose to do something new and exciting. We might change jobs, locations, or even the way we live our lives each day.

With spring here, more of us are getting up and getting out. The new beginnings all around us stir our souls and encourage us to take a fresh look at life and nudge us to put one foot in front of

the other to change things and ourselves. We are wise to take things at our own pace and take the time to discover just what it is that will be right for us in a particular stage in life. When one stage of life ends, we often find that there is a new beginning right before our very eyes.

T.S Eliot in “Little Gidding” wrote:

*What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.....
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.....And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well.*

Or in the words of our closing hymn:

*In our end is our beginning;
In our time infinity:
In our doubt there is believing;
In our life, eternity.
In our death a resurrection;
At the last, a victory,
Unrevealed until its season,
Something God alone can see.*

If we are able to live our lives with faith and hope and strength and the knowledge that we are the bright and wise children of God, we will find ourselves able to rejoice in the new beginnings we discover when we can emerge from the tombs of necessary transformation.

-- Amen