

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

April 11, 2010

2nd Sunday of Easter

Ezekiel 37:1-10

1 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.

2 He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry.

3 He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know."

4 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

5 Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.

6 I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord."

7 So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone.

8 I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

10 I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

John 20:19-31

19When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

24But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

26A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

30Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

"A Miracle. A Doubt. A Duty."

A Miracle.

During Holy Week I so enjoyed placing symbols and images outside the sanctuary doors on the bench and in the new waterfall pond. When you gathered you noticed those things as a sign of what was coming in worship.

I've really enjoyed that little respite of nature right there at the front of our church. That moving water is, well, it is moving. I think of it and refer to it as "living water."

I'm not sure that people even noticed the water on Good Friday. When worshippers arrived that evening the water was moving—ah still living. By the time the worshippers were leaving, I had slipped outside and turned off the water in order that it was stilled. The living water had become stilled and stopped. It was, if you will, dead.

When worshippers returned on Sunday morning they found the water moving again and alive. It was Sunday morning, that first day of the week, and Easter day--that day in which the women went to the tomb only to find the folded grave clothes and a living Jesus. Last Sunday morning I used the living water as the focus of the symbols that I placed outside our sanctuary doors.

There was the folded “grave clothes.” There was an Easter Lily that was placed right in the flow of water. And there was the crown of thorns that was also placed right in the flow of water. I placed it at the top of the waterfall so that it was leaning on the large stone that the water spills over as it begins its flow.

That crown of thorns had been in the Squirrel Room closet for a year. The Squirrel Room closet is certainly the scariest place in this whole building. It seems to be the place where mice go to die where stuff somehow multiplies. The crown of thorns was in storage back there.

I had received that crown of thorns from the ladies. A year ago at the beginning of Lent Jane Workman and I believe Joan Douglas too had collaborated and made it of Hawthorne twigs. They made it out of Hawthorne branches because they bear long, sharp, and large thorns. It is dramatic to say the least.

Sunday morning I placed that crown of thorns in the flow of living water. After worship was done and all had gone home to prepare their Easter ham, Diana and I were putting things away, packing up, and tidying up as we typically do after worship. She said, “Let me help you get those things outside.”

We went outside to living water and I handed her things. When I pulled the crown of thorns out of the water—at the same time we both took in a gasp of air. Were we really seeing what we were seeing? We were. There were red buds. Clear. Visible. Red buds. In those few short hours red buds had grown on those branches.

We were both stunned and in awe of the wonder of God. Had this really happened? Yes, of course it had. It was right there in front of our eyes. We could see it clearly and as plain as day. I immediately grabbed my little digital camera and holding the camera with one hand and the

crown of thorns with the other I snapped a shot. That picture is on the bulletin cover today. You can see those clear red buds on the crown of thorns.

I tell you it was dead, dead. They were dry old dead twigs. It was like the valley of the dry bones. “Mortal can these bones live.” And the answer is no. Of course they cannot live. But the breath connects them bone to bone and sinews grow upon them—and they are alive.

That twig was that same valley of dry bones. Dead. Dead. Can it live? Of course not. But—BUT in fact, as the apostle says, “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead.” Buds—clear and visible red buds had grown on it after it had been in that living water for a little over 3 hours.

It is God’s doing. It is a miracle. It is Easter. It is resurrection. It is a miracle. Life from that which was dead. Life from that which there should be no life at all—and wow—there it is staring me (and us) in the face. Life that cannot be stopped. It is God’s doing. It is a miracle.

A Doubt.

Thomas was not there that Easter evening when they all gathered together. He was not with them, but he heard about what they had to say. They were telling him all about how Jesus had been with them. They probably told the story over and over again. They not only were telling it to Thomas, but they were telling it to themselves. This was remarkable. It was incredible. It was stunning. Jesus who they watched die—he was alive and they had sat with him there in the house that evening.

Thomas—who we will later tag with the designation, “Doubting Thomas,” says, “Unless I see him and can put my hand in his side and

touch the place where the nails were I just cannot believe it.” It was not that he could not believe but that he was overwhelmed with this whole story. This was just not how things work. He knew it. They knew it. The laws of nature knew it. Everyone knew it. Death does result in life.

I can almost see him there. Thomas listens to them tell this story and his eyes start to light up and his chest starts to lift. And then he almost shakes it off with a shaking of his head—“no, it just does not work that way. I won’t believe it unless I touch him.”

It is a week later and this time they are all together. Everyone is there and Thomas is too. While the gospel writer does not explain why he says this, but he tells us they were in the house and the “doors were shut.” The doors were shut and Jesus came and stood among them. There he is in the midst of them. Did he pass through the door, did he just appear out of nowhere—I don’t know and it really is not of consequence.

As the account goes: they are gathered; Jesus appears among them; Jesus greets them with peace; Jesus invites Thomas to touch. Thomas gets it right away. He clearly gets it that this is Jesus. He falls down and proclaims, “My Lord and my God.” There is no record of him ever actually touching even though that had been his original request and the supposed condition of his belief.

Of course he doubts. Of course we doubt. I can see clearly those red buds. Diana and I were just standing there looking right at them last Sunday and asking each other, “Are they really there?” “Is that what I think it is?” Surely it was. But doubt—oh yes.

Do I believe it? Yes. Do I doubt it? Yes. Did Thomas believe? Yes. Did Thomas doubt? Yes. Does my belief take all my doubt away? No. Did Thomas’ belief take all his doubt away? I hardly think so. Do you doubt? Yes. Do you believe? Yes.

Those things can be together—doubt and belief. Where doubt and belief intersect and where there are those places and those moments where we get it—that is faith. There are these moments when we see, when we grasp, when we get it that it is bigger than our reality. God is this life that cannot be stopped.

We know despair and death and it takes the eyes of faith to see life and resurrection. We doubt that we are really seeing what we are seeing. It takes belief to grasp it and get it. Look. Look there are buds on it. This is God's doing. Look.

A Duty.

Yes, a miracle, a doubt, and a duty. A duty.

We have a duty. We have a duty to really look. Look at that crown of thorns and see that there really are buds on there. It was dead dead! And now it is alive alive! There really are buds there. This is a miracle. It is God. It is resurrection. Tell this story. Tell about it. Yes tell about it—that is the duty. It is our duty. We are witnesses to this miracle of life.

But it is bigger than that. What if we look at our own lives? What if we look at our own lives as that crown of thorns? I mean look—really look. Not just a cursory look, but a deep looking at our life.

Do you see it? Do you see those buds there? Do you see that there is in you and there is in me and there is in us this life—do you see it? There is this life that cannot be stopped. There is this life that is growing. There is this living—oh this fully alive love of God that is budding in you. It is alive---see it? Look closer? Look again? See it? Okay, sure you doubt it—that's okay. But look—look again with the eyes of faith. Now see it? And let it grow. And tell someone else about it. He says, "You will be my

witnesses.” That is the duty. That we let the budding life grow. That we share it. That we tell it.

It all starts with the looking. Will you look? Will you look deeper than the doubt? Will you look deeper than your doubt to see the miracle that God is? Will you look deeper than your doubt to see the miracle that God is in you? Amen.



Picture taken of the crown at 12:52PM on Easter Day. Note red buds!!!