

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners on our journey together this Lenten season.

Now I know you have heard me talk about the church liturgical seasons and I suspect for most of you they are mostly meaningless. On the other hand, some of you may pay close attention to them. Do any of you know a simple clue to when a church liturgical season change occurs? Yes, the color of the paraments on the altar and the back wall. Can anyone name another obvious signal of a change of season? Yes, the color of my clerical shirt thanks to Heather Ballaine or the color of a pastor's stole. We are fast approaching a change of season from Lent to The Three Days and then to Easter meaning that in the next two weeks, we will have touched on three liturgical seasons. Next week is Palm Sunday the last Sunday in Lent and the last this liturgical year for the color purple. For the Three days, I will wear white for Maundy Thursday, black for Good Friday, and white again for Easter. Easter Sunday is actually the end of the Three Days **and** the first of seven Sundays in the season of Easter which has a liturgical color of white. Then on May 24th, we have Pentecost with my favorite color of red. For the record, May 24th will be my last Sunday preaching here. We will be leaving later that week to be at a family reunion in Florida and then we will go home to Alaska.

I began today with that liturgical stuff because I wanted it as a lead in - into an overview of our Lenten journey. On the first Sunday of Lent, we had Matthew's account of Jesus in the wilderness which was reminiscent of the Israelites 40 year journey through the wilderness in their exodus from Egypt. That was followed by Jesus and Nicodemus meeting mostly in secret, in the middle of the night where Jesus talks to Nicodemus about being born again. It is pretty much a fact of life that wilderness experiences can either kill us or recreate us. Then for the third Sunday in Lent Jesus meets with the woman at the well, once again kind of in secret, while defying all kinds of societal norms. It is not that Jesus did not know about those norms, no it was because Jesus was awake to the harm those norms cause to individual people, especially marginalized people, the very people Jesus was **most interested** in serving. Along this line, I saw a Facebook post by a Christian friend of mine in Alaska that essentially said accountability is more important than compassion. I have to wonder how Jesus would respond to that kind of an idea or statement.

Last week, for the 4th Sunday in Lent, we had Jesus healing a man born blind. I think one of the most important verses in that reading was verse 32 that said, "**Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.**" Anyone care to use some more current phrases to say the same thing as this verse? How about history making or record setting? And finally, today, we have the story of Lazarus, where Jesus raises a man from being dead for four days by merely speaking to that man Lazarus. Has anyone noticed a pattern in our readings during this Lenten season? The pattern begins by connecting Jesus' humanity to our humanity and then begins a series of increasingly more powerful miracles or signs. Demonstrations of the power of God in Jesus, in the world, and which we will see culminate for us in two weeks. Come back in two weeks for the end of this pattern and the start of **new** life.

Now, we could spend time looking at Martha or Mary, or the disciples, or the villagers, or even the other bystanders, but really who are the most important characters in this story? Lazarus, who was unquestionably dead by all the societal standards at that time, not to mention he reeked. And Jesus, Johnny come late, who wept as recorded in verse 35. Why or for whom did Jesus weep? Earlier in the reading, Jesus said Lazarus was only sleeping, that this disease did not cause death. Would Jesus have then wept for Lazarus? I do not think so. I think Jesus wept because Jesus realized that all those insiders, so close to Jesus, **still** lacked faith in spite of all the miracles they saw Jesus perform. What about us? Was Jesus weeping for us too? Did Jesus already understand that in spite of the fact that we would have 66 books in the Bible that tell us about God's compassion, grace, love, and mercy; we would still **lack** faith. We would still not **believe** in God's plan. We would still have to **try** to do it ourselves. We would still want **our** control. We would still want **involvement** on our own terms, **not** God's terms.

In our reading from Ezekiel, in the midst of all those dry, lifeless bones, God says to Ezekiel to, “**Therefore prophesy and say to them: Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people, and I will bring you back to the land of Israel.**” Ashley Wheeler in her God Pause devotional on this reading said, “*This storm is temporary and this hope will endure forever.*” Do we really believe this? Do we have this kind of faith?

Our second reading from Romans begins with, “**To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.**” For many churches, Paul’s use of the word flesh is interpreted almost exclusively in sexual terms, but I completely disagree with that interpretation. I think Richard Rohr would say Paul’s use of the word flesh equates to **our ego**. I think this thought is also echoed when Sundays and Seasons said, “*For Paul, The driving force behind our actions and values is our sinful desire for self-satisfaction.*” In view of some earlier comments I made in this homily, we might define flesh as being worldly, but just what do I mean by that? Well, one view of worldly is that accountability is more important than compassion or things matter more than people, he who has the most toys or most homes or most yachts or most money - wins. The question for us becomes – is that God’s plan?

Hear then the good news:

Two quotes from Ashley Wheeler’s God Pause Devotionals on our reading from John:

*“We witness Christ both as one of us and as one who is exalted beyond what we can ever imagine. Christ who has come down and experienced **our** earthly pain and God who envelopes **us** with love and compassion.”*

*“We are forever **changed** by the life-giving power of Christ’s resurrection and the promise of eternal life.”*

Death is not the end.

Death is the beginning of a new adventure with God.

You are a child of God.

There is nothing that can separate you from the love of God.

There is nothing God cannot overcome even four day old death.

Grace and peace to you my friends, this week – live life happily and hopefully.

Amen