

Lent, Mid-Week 6, Wednesday, 3/12/08, St. James, Vicar Cathy Rohrs preaching.

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 126

John 19:31-42

It has been almost two years now, since my father passed away. We were close, he and I. When I was a teenager, we used to go for long walks in the woods and long canoe rides down the West Branch of the Susquehanna River. I could talk about anything with him. Sometimes he would give me advice: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” And I’d think about what he said and by doing that, I would often re-frame the problem that I was having or the situation I found myself in. I’d ask him all kinds of stuff and he always had answers for me. I thought he was the wisest, kindest man I’d ever known.

Once we were eating a picnic lunch after church one Sunday. We were in a place called Shingletown Gap in Rothrock State Forest and we were sitting at the base of a huge white pine tree; we were leaning against its trunk. As we were finishing our lunch, the wind picked up a little and he looked up the trunk of the tree towards the top where the branches were. He said, “Look” and pointed upwards. When I looked up, I was shocked to see the top of the huge tree swaying quite a bit from the wind. He said, “The tree is flexible. That’s why it is so strong and can grow so tall.”

The tree is flexible. I immediately knew that this was a parable of sorts. (My father was a teacher, so he always spoke like this.) The tree was strong because of its flexibility. Its strength and flexibility enabled it to grow tall. If I can continue to be flexible, I will continue to be strong. If I am flexible and strong, I can grow tall. But what does that mean? Well, with my father, if you poked and prodded long enough, it always came back to theology. Why would you want to be flexible and strong? You would want to be flexible and strong so you can bend to the wind of God and go where God calls and do what God bids you to do even though some times you’d prefer the wind wasn’t blowing and you could be still and all you had to worry about was growing tall.

It has been almost two thousand years now, since my LORD passed away on a cross. We were close, he and I. When I was a teenager, we used to read the Bible together and sing hymns and I would pray to him. I could talk about anything with him. Sometimes he would give me advice, like: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” And I’d think about what he said and by doing that, I would often re-frame the problem I was having or the situation I found myself in. I’d ask him all kinds of stuff he always had answers for me. I thought he was the wisest, kindest LORD I would ever know.

Once we were eating a meal together during church on a Sunday. He said, “Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.” Then he said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.”

This is my body, given for you. My blood, shed for you. I immediately knew that this was a parable of sorts. The bread was his body and the wine was his blood. It was given for me. “I am the bread of Life” I remember him saying once. And also: “I am the living/moving/fresh water.” But what does that mean? Well, with my LORD, if you poked and prodded long enough, it always came back to theology. Would I believe that Jesus is the bread of Life? Would I believe that Jesus is the living water? Why would I want to believe those things? I want to believe those things so I can bend to the wind of God and go where God calls me and do what God bids me to do even though I’d prefer the wind wasn’t blowing and I could be still and all I had to do was worry about growing tall.

It seems like ages ago in our readings that my LORD was called “the Lamb of God” by John the Baptist beside the Jordan River. Then my LORD was driven by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted. By resisting the temptation, my LORD was bending to the wind of God, the Spirit, the breath of God, and in so doing he stayed flexible towards God’s will and he grew stronger.

Later, when the priest Nicodemus came to him at night, my LORD knew that Nicodemus only came to him and only believed in him because of the miracles he performed. He challenged Nicodemus’ little tiny faith by speaking of being born from above, being born anew. That kind of new birth would bring about radical changes in behavior, not hesitant little steps. I pondered that.

Next, my LORD went right through Samaria instead of going around it like most Jews did to avoid being ritually defiled. To my LORD, bringing the kingdom of God to people was more important than following ritual. The woman asked for the living water that my LORD was offering so she would not have to come back to the well. My LORD told the woman at the well that *he* was the living/moving/fresh water and sent her to fetch others so they could receive the water, too. I wondered if my LORD was saying that the way to keep the water fresh and living and moving was to share it.

My LORD performed a great sign in Jerusalem and made many disciples and many enemies there. There was a man there who had been blind from birth and my LORD made mud on a Sabbath day and put it on his eyes. My LORD told him to wash his eyes and then the man born blind could see. Never since the earth was formed did anyone hear of a man who had been born blind having his eyes opened. My LORD must be sent from God, but why then did he break the rules of the Sabbath and perform work by making mud and healing on the Sabbath? Surely he could have waited one more day to heal the man. It is curious. I ponder it still. Was he being flexible to the wind of God here, too? Did God call him and bid him to do this?

My LORD left Jerusalem after the healing and went back to where John the Baptist had been preaching so long ago. He was safe there. He preached there and performed more signs there. But he came back to the region of Judea, back into dangerous territory, to raise his friend Lazarus from the dead. My Lord told his disciples

that the sickness Lazarus had would not lead to death. I think my LORD was saying that Lazarus would not be separated from God no matter what happened. I think “death” meant separation from God more than that Lazarus had died and was in a rock tomb. My LORD waited two more days then went to the family of Lazarus. My LORD risked his own life for the life of a friend. He gave his own life for the life of a friend, because shortly thereafter, events unfolded that led to my LORD dying on the cross.

And I was thinking about how John the Baptist had called my LORD “the Lamb of God” and how Jesus died on the Day of Preparation for the day that was both a Sabbath and also Passover. And I wondered if the wind had picked up a little and my LORD who was so flexible to God’s will and so strong in faith had been called and bidden to die. But why to die? Why not to become king?

“I am the resurrection and the life” I heard my LORD say. He also said, “I am the vine, you are the branches.” But if the vine is crucified, what becomes of me? If my LORD is dead and he is life, how can this be? I know that he will be resurrected on the last day, but tonight he is lying in a garden tomb in Jerusalem on a hill. Nicodemus came back and did something radical. He helped Joseph of Arimathea to prepare the body for burial and laid my LORD to rest.

I believe that Jesus is the bread of Life. I believe that Jesus is the living water. I will allow my birth from above to change me radically like it finally did for Nicodemus. I will still be a disciple of my LORD even though he has been laid to rest.

Once in Capernaum my LORD had said things that were difficult for me to hear. He said, **John 6:56** ⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Those words were so hard to hear that many people who had been following him left him in Capernaum and didn’t follow him anymore. He asked the disciples if they would leave too and Peter said to him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

That is how I feel now. These words are harsh for me and difficult to understand. Jesus has been crucified and is dead. He is buried. But where else can I go? Who else can I turn to? My LORD has the words of eternal life. I have to cling to him. I cannot do otherwise.

I loved my father very much. I love him still. I will remember his words. ... I loved my LORD even more than my father. I love him still. I want to be flexible and strong so I can bend to the wind of God and go where God calls me to go and do what God bids me to do. I will remember my LORD’s words and signs. And I will ponder them.

Amen.