

Easter Day Evensong Homily 2018

Ezekiel 37. 1-14 The valley of dry bones

Luke 24. 1-35 The walk to Emmaus

Bereavement is a wicked thing. Bereavement, something we all know or come to know, is an emotion we cannot count or control, it has no boundaries, and it can catch us unawares so that we cease to be in full control of our emotions.

Bereavement is a wicked thing. My father is currently visiting a bereavement counsellor, in preparation for my mother's imminent death, for having watched and waited by her side as she slowly passes away because of her cancer, his bereavement started some time ago.

The women at the tomb and the disciples were bereaved. They had lost everything. After three years of faithful following they had slipped away and allowed Jesus to be brutally murdered for nothing more than for proclaiming the unconditional love of God. They had failed, which compounded their sense of bereavement. They did not know what we know entering Holy Week. They did not know the end of the story like we do.

The two walking on the Road to Emmaus were bereaved. They had followed Jesus, perhaps at a little distance but they loved him, but now he was gone, taken from them, and as they placed each step walking away from the scene of the crime in Jerusalem, their bereavement was deepening, as the full reality of their loss began to sink in. Bereavement is a wicked thing.

But then, like dry bones coming together, and flesh returning, and breath flowing, Jesus speaks. 'Peace be with you.' Not bereavement be with you, but peace be with you. 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, see that it is I myself. Touch me and see'.

Oh how the bereaved would love to be able to touch and see their loved ones again, even if for a moment, to take away their fear. But as living beings we do die, and as spiritual beings we will rise and although we cannot know what that will be like, we do know that in rising from the dead, Jesus then promised his life to us, to take away our bereavement, to give us peace.

It seems to me not just as a priest this Easter, but as a bereaving son, that life is worthless without hope. I don't see the point of it. Life without hope is at its worst survival, and at its best, mere indulgence. Neither of those efforts, survival or indulgence, are any use to us when we die, but hope gives us everything. Hope gives us a framework for living, hope gives us a purpose, hope in Jesus gives us a

person to be known by, to be loved by, even when we are alone, even when we die. Hope is worth living for. Hope is worth dying for.

The Christian Hope is our confidence in the risen Jesus. He is risen and we are the Easter people, and Alleluia is our song. Bereavement is beaten by hope, Alleluia.

As scripture says in realistic and yet wonderful terms;

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Romans 5.1-5.

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