

Lent V Year A

“The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, unbind him and let him go.”

We don't watch the Today Show anymore, somehow we've ended up in the kitchen of a morning having coffee and reading the paper...Instead of complaining about what's on the Today Show, now we complain about how little there is in the paper... But I remember a show several years ago....it was the usual fare; hyperkinetic people from all over the country behind the production barricades vying for attention with their posters, and holding up their babies... to get on television...their moment of fame (and there's always someone there from Alabama)... The usual health tip; the pluses and minuses of coffee...the virtues of fiber...Is your teen happy? Yeah, right... The ubiquitous panel of experts....Jean Chatsky to help us plan our financial lives....Barbara Corcoran's real estate tips... Meredith, Matt and Al and the other so-called talent bantering nonsense...

On this day I remember one segment broke to the ice-rink there at Rockefeller Plaza....and, a couple of Olympic skaters were on hand to perform a duet on the ice...Meredith, smiling, aglow, clapping her mittened hands....It was all so predictable...I was doing the crossword puzzle...and happened to glance up at the screen right about the time the couple swooshed past the Titan himself....he who I remember from a childhood visit to New York City long ago, he who I remembered from my mother reading us Greek mythology when we were young... a golden glowing, graceful sculptured depiction of Prometheus the Titan, an ancestor to the Gods....His story written about as early as there was such a thing as writing....He the protagonist in one of many creation stories of the Mediterranean Basin...and here he is again, many of you have seen him...here, traveled far, in the twenty first century amid the skyscrapers in the heart of New York City...here amid the steel and concrete still bearing fire to the world.

You know his story...the story of Prometheus...the myth of the bringing of fire: Because there is bad blood between the Titans and their progeny, the upstart gods, (family dysfunction on a mythic scale) Prometheus steals fire from Zeus, the king of the Gods, and brings the fire to humankind....because of this hubris, Zeus punishes Prometheus by binding him on a high cliff...and each day an eagle arrives to eat his liver, which has been caused to rejuvenate each day for a presumed eternity. It is only millennia later that Heracles releases Prometheus from his punishment; unbinds him so that he may eternally bring fire to humankind.

In the Genesis Creation story we have the man and woman being disobedient also in order to eat from the tree of knowledge, which I would characterize not as a “fall”, but rather as a coming of age, taking on God-

knowledge... If there is a so-called fall in scripture it would be the moment envy and violence enter the world a few chapters later. The Prometheus story is also a story about coming of age....about humankind learning the art of fire....learning enlightenment....taking up its own God knowledge and God-likeness....embracing this primordial element and using it for the benefit and betterment of the species. In the classical Greek as well as ages later in the English and European Romantic Period poets and playwrights take up the story of Prometheus....and Prometheus is portrayed in every case, the hero, the good servant, while the gods are deemed capricious, aloof and downright cruel....so the gods in this myth become the representation of abusive power, while Prometheus is acting for the good on behalf of humankind....He the symbol of the imagination, the irrepressible human spirit, the light of the world, the Word dare we say, up and against the evil that has found its way into being. It is something of a resurrection story as well, isn't it? The hero Titan doomed to an eternal death in life.... And then to be released...unbound.... given over to freedom. This myth would have certainly been known to our Greek speaking Gospel writers.

We have two resurrection stories in our lectionary texts for today. First, The figure of the prophet in the valley of the dry bones...We are told that these bones represent Israel...the nation, moribund in crisis....facing despair, deportation to an alien land, the death of a people....but the bones receive the enlightened words of the prophet that there is yet life even among the dead....and the bones hear and receive the breath of life, the Spirit of God, and are enlivened...and indeed live again....a new life after a certain death.

In our Gospel text we also have a resurrection story....Lazarus, Jesus' friend also a representation of Israel, moribund, dead to possibility...Israel occupied by a brutal imperial regime, and to make matters worse their own Jewish leadership is bought off....there would seem to be no hope....bound by the powers that be.... aching for the fire of God to consume the state of things, and transform this way of life into the way God would have it. Rhetorically this story prefigures Jesus' own death and resurrection drama to come.....and for that matter ours too. Let us note again that this is not historical narrative, but theological narrative..... Matthew putting forth a profound premise as to the way life really is.

And other characters play roles in these two stories as well: Mary and Martha, to name two. The point is that resurrection is participatory, collaborative; it takes all of us to bring it about. We're all in it together. And the business of resurrection, at least according to John is a decidedly present reality. It is not something merely promised for the future. Jesus tells Martha I **am** the Resurrection and the life here and now....and we are sent dear brothers and sisters as he our brother is sent, as resurrection life.....into the dark tombs to bring fiery light and to unbind.

We are born for great purpose, therefore... We live for a purpose, a divine purpose...and that purpose is to bear fire to a dark and moribund world...like our mythy brother Prometheus, the fire-giver...like our brother Jesus of Nazareth whom we call the light of the world...Like our long line of ancestors of the faith, we bring the fire of enlightenment and truth....we bring the ardent glow of justice and kindness, transforming mercy and dignity and freedom from that which binds.

....The words of Jesus ringing in our ears... “unbind him”....unbind her...he that was dead is now made alive...she that was dead is now made alive....that is our call too dear people of god...we go into the world to unbind...to be the good servants...to release those bound by the cloths of death...to release the politically oppressed...the economically disenfranchised...to unbind the poor from their lot... to unbind those who suffer from injustice....to unbind the diseased....we are sent to unbind the undignified....to unbind the fetters of shame....we are sent to call them out of their tombs, the stench notwithstanding, and anoint them with fire....and set them free, so that they too become fire-bringers to a dark world wrapped in the clothing of death.

And there is something more, something for us to remember this day....that when death comes upon us in its myriad forms in the here and now....whether it is illness, addiction, depression, financial crisis, worry, disappointment or despair... know the promise brothers and sisters, Ezekiel’s and John’s ardent premise... that the bones will live again....we must speak to the bones within which we live and prophesy....prophesy for the sake of each other that yes there is yet life....Dare we believe such a premise.

O mortal, can these bones live?....Yes... yes we must prophesy....prophesy in word and action... We, titans, as the raised body of Christ...yes, by God’s breath, these bones can live....and yes they will live afire with the light of God which is the light of our own blessed humanity....yes they will live afire....and unbound....unbound from the world’s hate and fear....unbound and free....a perfect freedom within which love set ablaze will change the world....so let us go now unbound into the world bearing the gift of fiery freedom....with words of hope and truth... To unbind them.... to unbind them all... and let them go.