

Lent 5 A 2020

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 130

Romans 8:6-11

John 11:1-45

After so many words,
Let us enter together –
And yes, we are together,
Gathered from our separate places –
After so many words,
Let us enter together
Into silence.

The silence lying over the valley of dry bones.
The silence of the depths
Out of which we cry.
The silence of the tomb,
A cave
With a stone rolled across it.
The near silence of a city
Under orders to stay at home.
Silence.

After the silence,
The sounds of the story,
The gospel story we were given for today,
With its many many words.

Lord, he whom you love is ill.
Lord, if you had been here,
My brother would not have died.
If he loved him,
If he restored sight to the man born blind,
Couldn't he have kept this man from dying?
Lord, already there is a stench.

All of them,
All of us,
Devoted friends,
Faithful followers,
And those who wonder at him or scorn him,
Every single person in the story,
Circles around Jesus,
Telling him,

Asking him,
Pleading with him.
Lord, please.
Lord, why.
Lord, if only.
Lord, no.

This is our story too.
We are no different
Than the friends and the crowd
Gathered around Jesus.
We close in around him,
Telling, pleading, clinging.

How not?
This is a fearful time,
And we are human.

Our fear, anxiety, anger,
Blaming, posturing,
Hoarding,
Are the bitter truth
Of what it means to be human.

Remember, though,
That this also is true:
Our heroism,
Selflessness,
Heartfelt expressions of love and gratitude,
Acts of service humble and noble,
Are the essence of what it means to be human.
We are created for love, in the image of love.

And yet,
So often we act out of our frailty,
Rather than our splendor.
We do not change
Through all our generations.
Though we can be transformed,
We don't change.
We will always be human.
So the words of this story are our words today.

Lord, we whom you love are ill.
Lord, if you were here
We would not be dying.

See how you love us.
Could you not have kept this from happening?
Lord, already there is a stench.

With all our words swarming around him,
Jesus stands still in the middle of this story,
Proclaiming just one thing,
Over and over,
The glory of God.

Lord, he whom you love is ill.
You will see the glory of God.
Lord, if you had been here,
My brother would not have died.
You will see the glory of God.
Lord, already there is a stench.
You will see the glory of God.

The glory of God is a fearful thing.
Remember that when God appears
By a messenger angel,
The first words are always,
Don't be afraid.

The glory of God is an awful,
An awe-filled thing.
We take off our shoes,
We hide our eyes,
We fall on our faces.

We want it to be different.
When we look, on our own,
for signs of the glory of God,
We pick things of beauty,
Things that are sublime.
And we're not wrong,
We just fall short.
We find things we can understand,
Make room for in our hearts and minds.
Sunset rays breaking through the clouds,
A waterfall,
A baby's smile.
The inexpressible beauty of a final chord,
And the silence after.
All these are good,
And they keep our spirits strong

And our hearts warm.

But the glory of God,
As it comes to us in scripture,
In tradition,
In the visions of the great mystics,
The glory of God is terrifying.

The glory of God is a pillar of cloud by day
And fire by night.
The glory of God is a valley full of bones
Rattling together into life,
Sucking in breath,
Standing up and setting forth.
The glory of God
Is a man dying on a cross
On a stony hillside
Under a blazing sun
That then goes dark.

The glory of God
Is the fullness of God
Breaking open our lives,
Pouring into our hearts,
Unbinding us
And letting us go.

No one in this gospel story
Really wants it to happen this way.
They want a different answer,
A different action,
Maybe even a different friend and brother,
Healer and teacher,
Lord and master.

When they say,
Lord, he whom you love is ill,
The response is,
You will see the glory of God.

Why couldn't he have said,
I'll be right there.
Don't worry,
I can heal him.
I've done it before;
I'll do it again.

When the sisters say,
One after the other,
Lord, if you had been here,
My brother would not have died,
The response is,
You will see the glory of God.

Why couldn't he have said,
I am so sorry,
That was such a mistake.
I should have come right away.
He didn't even say,
I know that was hard for you,
But I had my reasons.
And it's not too late,
I can still fix it.

The crowd says,
See how he loved him.
Couldn't he have kept this man from dying?
He says nothing,
But walks towards the cave.
Then Martha,
Unable to help herself,
Says the practical thing we all are thinking.
This has gone on too long;
It's too late,
There's nothing in there
But a stinking corpse.

And Jesus says,
You will see the glory of God.

The glory of God is a fearful thing.
It looks like a dead man walking out of a tomb,
Wrapped in bands of cloth.
The glory of God
Is Jesus, God who is one of us,
Jesus,
Saying to us,
Unbind him, and let him go.

This is the glory of God
At work among us, then and now.

Our ancestors in the faith
knew what it was like
To be knit back together,
Bone to bone and flesh to flesh,
To have life breathed into them again.
Our ancestors knew what it was like
To be called out of slavery
Into the challenging life of freedom.
Our ancestors knew what it was like
To cry out of the depths,
To wait for the Lord
More than watchers for the morning.
Our ancestors in the faith
Knew what it was like
To plead for help,
To plead for comfort,
To plead for a miracle.

And they got one.
They saw the glory of God.

Now it's our turn.

Lord, we whom you love are ill.
We will see the glory of God.

Lord, if you had been here,
This would not have happened.
We will see the glory of God.

None of us know what that will look like,
Nor can we.

But this is our faith,
And our hope.

The glory of God
Is still here among us,
Hidden, yet healing.

The glory of God is still here among us.
Breathing with us,
Knitting us back together,
Calling us out of our caves,
Setting us free.

We can trust this truth.
We can trust it,
Until we see it.