

**Fifth Sunday of Lent – Year A
(Apr. 6, 2014)**

Roll That Stone Away

Jesus said, “Roll that stone away.” But Lazarus’s sister said, “Don’t roll that stone away. Leave things as they are. The smell would be unbearable.” Are we ever like that? Do we ever say, “Leave things as they are? Let’s not touch this or that issue. It might explode in our faces.” Indeed we even say, “Let’s not open a can of worms.” But Jesus was opening a whole tomb of worms

And then he called, “Lazarus,” and he commanded, “Come out!” And that dead man came out and started to live.

Something has been happening in all our Lenten readings, something that Jesus started with his very first public statement when he said, “It’s time. The Kingdom of God is here. Repent and believe the Good news.” Repent. The Greek word that the evangelist uses means to have a complete change of mind and heart, a total about face. Jesus has come for change. His greatest wish and desire is to change the world. How does he go about that? By asking the people to change. And not to change superficially, but radically. He is asking for complete and radical transformation.

Consider what he does. After he proclaims the Kingdom and asks for change, he calls his first disciples. He calls them to follow him in a radically new life-style. They left everything, the Gospels tell us, to follow him. Everything: profession and family. They were fishermen, an honorable employment; family: Peter left his wife, and perhaps others did, too who were married; James and John left their father, Zebedee, right on the lake shore where they had been mending their nets. Left him alone to carry on the family business and to mend the nets without them.

On these Lenten Sundays we have been hearing this same challenge. Indeed that’s what Lent is all about. On the first Sunday it was the temptations of Jesus in the desert after he had fasted forty days. The devil comes along and presents him with the enticements that have led people astray down through the ages: riches, honors, pride, and Jesus repudiates them all. He says that is not the way it is to be. And he is telling us as well

that it is not to be our way either if we are to be part of his kingdom.

A week later on the Second Sunday of Lent we heard about the Transfiguration, a remarkable story of radical transformation. We hear this story not just for our edification but as a challenge to enter the process that will result in our own transformation in Christ as we follow the way he calls us.

Two Sundays ago it was the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Jesus offers her living water. She doesn't understand but in the dialogue that follows he draws her deeper and deeper into the mystery of who he is until he finally tells her that he is the Messiah. She then goes and tells the people of her town and everybody comes out to see. They see, they listen, and they believe. Again, radical change.

Last week it was the man born blind. He receives his sight, and his life is changed.

Today is the climax of it all. He gives life back to a man who had died. And obviously that new life would be very different from the way he had lived before.

The Church has deliberately given us these beautiful but challenging passages during this Lenten season, a season of repentance and conversion, that is, a time to change. We have been hearing from people who are running for political office, and we'll continue to hear from them until the next election. They all say they will change things. They will make things better. But what they are talking about does not go as deeply as what the Lord is proposing. He knows that we all thirst for something more than power and influence no matter how well-meaning or the superficial pleasures of this life that can only satisfy for a brief time. He knows how we need to have our eyes open to the things that really matter. He knows how we must be enlivened, given new life that is full of strength and courage to accomplish the great task of continuing the work of God's Kingdom.

And what is that task? Basically as I said in the beginning it means changing the world. That's what God wants. That's what God keeps crying for through the prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures. That's what Jesus asks for in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Parable of the Last Judgment. That's why he asks us to take care of the poor, to love our enemies, do good to those who hurt us, to love one another as he has loved us. And don't ever

forget what this season leads us to. It leads us to the cross. Jesus loved us to death, and if we are to love one another as he loved us we must be willing to die for one another.

Now I'm sure there are a few of you, maybe even many of you, who are saying to yourselves, "Is he out of his mind? This is hopelessly unrealistic, grandiose, and downright impossible." Yes, it is difficult. Very difficult. And if it's unrealistic and grandiose, then we would have to say that Jesus was unrealistic and grandiose. But you know, that's the way he lived and he did die for us because he loved us so much. When he asks us to do the same he is only asking us to be open to the graces he is willing to give, the strength and courage to do these things, just as he gave the Samaritan woman the living water of faith, just as he gave sight to the man born blind, just as he gave life to his dead friend, Lazarus. These were impossible things, too. But that's what he wants and that's what he calls us to. Remember he told Peter, what is impossible for humans is possible for God

I can't help but feel that if we all did our best to respond to the call of Jesus to open our eyes, to be filled with his life, notice I said "did our best" because we'll never do it perfectly, but if we really tried with the grace of the Lord, then the kind of change that the politicians are promising would happen easily. But without that effort I'm afraid it's just going to be politics as usual with partisanship and selfishness the driving force rather than what is really for the good of the people.

The Kingdom of God, my friends, begins with each of us, responding in all sincerity, which means doing the best we can. Each one of us can only do a little bit but if we all work together then we really can do what Jesus asks us to do. We really can change the world.