

<pray>

Confusion.

I was feeling a little lost yesterday. I had written down a 'to-do list' and, no matter where I looked, I just could not find it. After a couple of hours, I finally did locate it here in the church, where I had forgotten it after the confirmation class Friday afternoon. It was just words on a page – but I felt so lost without it, sure I would forget something.

Yesterday was also a time of a little celebration, as my wife and I were able to finally pay off a fairly significant loan we had taken on. Benita sent out a note to the kids that this was paid off – and then, a few minutes later, sent out little pictures saying “April fools!” “Prank!”

Which totally confused everyone, including me. Was our loan paid off? Was it not? Was it a joke? When I spoke to Benita afterwards, she laughed and shared “I had just found some neat pictures which I wanted to share. Maybe the joke is that there *wasn't* a joke... I told her that not only were the kids confused, but I was too – what was she trying to say?

All this confusion reminded me of a time many years ago when I had tried something which just didn't work as I had expected. I had to go to work, and for whatever reason, all the under-wear were in the washing machine. 'No problem' I thought – 'I'll just dry them out quick – what would be the fastest way?' I know how quick the micro-wave cooks things, so I thought: 'that will dry them out quick!' and stuck them in for a couple of minutes.

Warning: if your under-wear are wet and you want to dry them out, do NOT use the micro-wave! It does not dry them! It only makes them hot! Depending how long you put them in for, very hot!

Life can be so confusing! You may have experienced that confusion too: where did I put that? What did I say? What did you mean? Where did I put that? Why did I do that? What was I going to do?

My confusion of yesterday actually extended to the readings we have today.

This is Lent, right? I had to triple-check the readings for today – because they are not typical Lenten readings: Lent is about repentance, sorrowfully examining our sins, seeking to mend our ways to more fully live our new life in Christ – but these readings – they are all about *resurrection*. And not subtle or hidden, or something you have to seek for – these are about resurrection, resurrection, and nothing but the resurrection! So, I was confused, thinking: did we somehow slip into Easter without me realizing it? I actually checked several sources to confirm that yes indeed, I did have the right readings.

So let's look at the readings, and let's talk about resurrection – but let's go from where we are right now, where we exist today in our parish, and then see how we move towards the resurrection that Jesus is talking about. Let's see if God can help us out of our confusion.

In Ezekiel, we get the prophecy of the “dry bones” ('Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones ...')

Ezekiel is shown a valley of skeletons, and told to speak a daring word of God to the bones. Initially, Ezekiel tells the bones of God's intention to restore them to life. Then, Ezekiel preaches to the spirit, calling it to enter the lifeless bodies. The bones do not restore themselves to life, but they are the recipients of God's Grace to fill them with a future they cannot grant themselves.

The exiles were in despair! They could see no future – they had been devastated, they were weak and

few in number. In effect, Ezekiel has been instructed to preach to a dying community. He announces that God will revive the people by giving them new flesh, and then filling them with His Spirit. Now the Hebrew word translated for us as “breath” can mean “breath” and it also means “wind” -- but it can also mean “spirit.”. If you translate it as “spirit,” this is what is said:

“Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause spirit to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put spirit in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.’

“Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to the spirit, prophesy, mortal, and say to the spirit: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O spirit, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.’ I prophesied as he commanded me, and the spirit came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

“Thus says the Lord God: I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live...”

How does that reflect to us? We are few in number, compared to the rest of the population. Are we a confused gathering, in need of the Lord?

Are we bones? Are we a people not full of vitality, of life, of *spirit*?

In the early 1990's, at St. Thomas' Fort McMurray, we regularly discussed at vestry meetings if we would need to shut down the congregation. We were small, we had no finances, we felt forlorn. A scant 10 years later, that same congregation was vital, filled with life and love, vibrant and eager.

What happened? Well, God sent His spirit.

I had an interesting experience here last fall. Over a period of a few Sundays, after I left each congregation in this parish following worship, I was thinking about the congregation I had just left and the thought came to me “I have claimed that place – just to let you know.”

So, I think I have a prophecy for you: God has claimed you. More than that, God has claimed where you live. Thus says the Lord God to you: 'My spirit shall enter you, and you shall live. You shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.' I am to say: 'Come O Holy Spirit, and breathe upon these people, that they may live.'

Resurrection is the biggest thing about Jesus. It is also the biggest thing about us! The very same Spirit that raised Jesus also raises us. The same resurrection miracle that brought Jesus alive brings us alive. We are shown this in the resurrection of Lazarus. Let's look at this lived-out parable.

Lazarus dies. Jesus knows he's going to die – and Jesus purposefully shows up after he is dead, to show, as He says, “this is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” And when He gets there, quite frankly Jesus gets indignant and angry.

Martha says to Jesus: “If you had been here, this would not have happened!” Mary, her first words to Jesus are: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died...” And we are told Jesus was “greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved... Jesus began to weep.”

Mary and Martha, great friends of Jesus, individually come up to Him and effectively say: “Lord, this

is all your fault – you could have prevented this!” And Jesus feels sad, angry, and indignant to the depth of His stomach. He begins to weep, not over the death of Lazarus, because he had faith that Lazarus was to rise, but rather in grief over the lack of belief and understanding of His friends – they, like many of us perhaps, believed that resurrection of the dead and the Messiahship of Jesus was a concept, an idea, at most a future-held realization – but Jesus needed them to understand, just as He needs us to, it is a NOW. Like I was confused about where my to-do list was, with what my wife was saying, with what would happen to my under-wear in the microwave – likewise, Mary and Martha were confused about Jesus and the power of God. And so Jesus says: “*Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?*” We can be shown all the glory in the world, in fact we often are, but never see it because of our lack of belief. However, if we believe, then we see the glory. Belief first! As we know, Jesus then rose Lazarus from the dead.

What are we to believe? We are to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. We are to believe that Jesus is God Incarnate. We are to believe that in walking with Jesus, in a personal relationship with Him, we have the Holy Spirit. We are to believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, that Jesus loves us, and that in Him we too have resurrection and life. Those who believe in Him will live, and everyone who lives and believes in Him will never die. This includes not just us as individual beings, but us as a congregation, us as a people. We are to believe, and in that belief, not be confused.

Believe this promise of God! Humble yourself, and pray. Embrace a relationship with Jesus, as a living, every-day lived-out reality. Take on the clothing of your baptism, and live it. Renew your oneness with Jesus through re-accepting His body and His blood in our Eucharist, our holy thanksgiving, today.

The bones do not restore themselves to life, but they are the recipients of God's Grace to fill them with a future.

Believe.

I repeat what I think I have been told:

God has claimed you. God has claimed where you live. God says: 'My spirit shall enter you, and you shall live. You shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.'

Come O Holy Spirit, and breathe upon these people, that they may live.

In Jesus' Name.

Amen.