

“The Dreams of Lent: Lazarus Begins the Journey Out”

A homily by Stephen Martz for the people of St. Nicholas

9 March 2008

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

Ezekiel 37:1-14 + Psalm 130 + Romans 8:6-11 + John 11:1-45

After that big dream, Lazarus could hardly wait to get to analysis the next morning. He rushed into Dr. Jesus’ office and breathlessly told him the dream we have just heard.

When he finished, voice trembling, he said, *“I’ve never had a dream like this before. What do you think it means?”*

“I don’t know,” Dr. Jesus told his patient. “But let’s see what we can make of it.”

There’s so much to it, I’m not even sure where to begin.

Let’s begin where the dream begins -- with you being ill. What do you make of that? Are there ways you are ill?

My sickness is despair. I have no friends, no meaningful relationships. Every relationship I’ve ever been in has died and left me feeling like dying. I don’t even know how to try anymore. I’m nearly 30 and I’ve never felt more alone. What makes it so awful is I don’t see it changing – not now, not ever. My life, my existence – it’s all meaningless. I might as well be dead. No one would miss me if I were gone.

No one? You don’t even feel you matter to your sisters?

My sisters? Ha! They grew up with the same parents I did and look at them now. Mary means well, but she's a whore. Every ounce of her feels as unlovable as I do. The only difference is that she's alone and unloved in a lot more beds than I am.

In the dream, though, they send for me. They seem concerned that you are ill and they want you to get better.

That's Martha to a T. She won't even let me be sick without having to be in control. She's always meddling; always sure she knows what's best for me and everyone else. Forever telling me what I should do. "Lazarus, you don't go out enough. You should go visit that nice girl we met by the well." "Lazarus, you sleep too much. You should get up before sunrise like I do." "Lazarus, Lazarus, Lazarus, you should, should, should."

You are really, really angry...

She's non-stop, just plain friggin' 24/7 nonstop. And you know why? Because if she ever stopped – if she stopped for even a moment and really listened – she'd have to face the pain inside her. Her own pain. She's just as empty and hopeless as I am. I've always felt unlovable and Martha and Mary are no different. We all share the same curse: we were born Bethanys.

Your family life *has* been horribly difficult and painful. Alcoholic parents and then that priest you thought wanted to help you...

Painful?!! No matter how much empathy you think you have, you can't begin to imagine.

No, you're right; I can't ever truly know what your life was like. But we've been working together for almost five years now and I wonder about this dream. I wonder if it may tell us that you right alongside the pain and hopelessness and unlovableness that have been so much a part of your life, there's something new going on inside.

What do you mean?

Well, let's look at Martha and Mary. When they appear in your dream, it's natural to think of them as Martha and Mary, your flesh-and-blood sisters, the ones who share the bedroom next to yours.

When Mary's not sharing it with some stranger....

But what if "Martha" and "Mary" also refer to parts of your psyche? What if they are like characters inside of you, and they represent parts of *you*?

You've talked before about looking at dreams this way, but I don't know.

Okay, but humor me. If they are parts of you, what might it mean that they send for me?

I suppose that would be parts of me trying to help some other part of me. But if they're parts of me, then in the dream you also must be a part of me...and so would "the disciples"...and "the Jews."

That may be a helpful way to think about it. Maybe for now, though, we can just stay with "Martha," "Mary," and "Jesus." Those inner figures suggest you have at least three parts of your psyche trying to help you, and they seem more hopeful than your ego sounded a few moments ago.

It's not easy for me to hope.

No it's not. I don't think it feels safe. Usually when you've hoped, or opened yourself to another person, you've been hurt and that has felt terrible, unbearable....

...Like I was falling apart...

...so a part of you may be convinced that hoping is the most dangerous thing in the world.

That's because it is. Every time I do – every time I begin to trust or connect to another human being, maybe with the exception of you – I've been burned. And I'm still not sure about you.

Well, Lazarus, I think it's fair to say that, being human, I, too, will disappoint and hurt you. Maybe when that happens, though, it doesn't have to be a complete crash and burn experience. Maybe the dream is even preparing us for that.

You mean because you wait two more days before you come to heal me?

Yes, and during that time you die. That would seem to be a real failure on my part.

But it's not the end of the story.

No. In a sense, it's the beginning. There are a lot of ways we can think about your dying in the dream. One of them is that I failed you in a catastrophic way, yet as you say, that isn't the end of the story. This may tell us something about our relationship and your ability to survive those times when I – and others -- fail you.

But you also think it tells me something about me, because you're not really the Dr. Jesus sitting before me. In the dream you are a part of me.

I think so. Your psyche selected me to represent something in *you*. Something stronger than hopelessness or unlovableness – something stronger even than death.

*When you say that, it makes me uncomfortable, like I want to just shout at you,
"But it's only a dream!"*

I think your ego does want to shout at me, and shout do loudly you forget your dream. Because if you begin to trust the dream, you'll have to risk coming out of your protective sleep. And that ego part of you is really determined to keep you safe.

Yeah, I know. And it's hard to ignore. That voice is what's kept me safe and alive all these years.

Safe, but also entombed – because it's convinced you that you are unlovable and silenced the voices of hope and love within you.

It's like I'm half dead. But that's better than being all dead.

Perhaps you are half alive. Maybe a lot more alive than your ego recognizes. Instead of seeing yourself as half-dead, I wonder what it would be like for you to see yourself as once-wounded, but now able to be fully alive.

I don't believe it. I don't want to believe it. What you are saying sounds logical, but it makes me feel really anxious – and I feel like I'm crawling out of my skin right now.

I can see that. This is hard work you are doing, and I don't want to suggest the dream says you are finished.

Good, 'cause I'm not.

But we've got a few minutes left, so why don't we go back to “the disciples” and “the Jews?”

Okay. What about them?

I thought of them because maybe they carry that feeling of crawling out of your skin. “The disciples” want to get what I’m saying – and remember, I represent a part of *you* - but they can’t and don’t. “The Jews” are divided, but mostly seem not to want to get it. I wonder if both “the disciples” and “the Jews” also are parts of you.

Probably. I can be pretty dense.

And your inner Martha and inner Mary, even though they want to help, don’t really get what I’m saying, either Martha’s sure she knows it all and Mary is having a hard time trusting me. It’s hard to come out of the cave when most of you wants to stay put, stay safe.

But you seem unfazed by all of them – well, except Mary. You got pretty upset when she began to weep.

I did – you did. It’s hard when others can’t or won’t see the truth you want to share with them. But what do you think all of this might be telling you about the drama going on inside your psyche?

That I’m walled off and afraid to change. The “Dr. Jesus” part of me is stronger than everything, stronger than everyone else in me, but it’s hard even for him because so many of those around him either don’t want to believe him --- or they say they do but misunderstand what he is saying. They don’t get it, don’t believe.

No they don’t; not yet. But this “Dr. Jesus” part of you seems connected to the greatest powers in the universe -- and he isn’t backing down. Listen to him.

-- long silence --

I want to. I really want to. But it's not easy.

It's not. Talk with him, though, this week and listen to what he has to say to you.
And we can come back to this dream next week, if you like.

Can I call you before then if I need to?

Yes, of course.