

Leaving the Tomb
April 6, 2014
Rev. Laura Hehner

Friends, the season of Lent is a trying time. And it's meant to be.

If it's not, we're not really doing it.

It's a life-giving time, and a comforting time, but only because it's a time of *questioning*.

It's a time of doubt, and temptation, and disruption, and discomfort---

--- each of these not-so-soothing moments leading us further and further

into a more comfortable place.

And this one's been tough for me. I didn't fast in the traditional sense, this year,

But have spent this season working to let go of other things.

This season, I've been watching as a lot of things normal and dear to me have fallen away,

Inside stuff. That quiet, silent, *personal* stuff. As well as some stuff on the *outside*,

tied tight to those things of the soul.

And this isn't something *special* or unique to *me*,

but something *each* of us feels through a lot of days as we walk.

... We've all been through some deeply trying times of loss, and change,

and disruption, and questioning, and struggle.

It's something natural to being alive, otherwise we haven't really lived.

I'd ask for each of us to take a moment in the quiet with God,

to think about some of those painful moments of struggle
which later shaped us into something stronger...

...But I know I don't need to. Those moments *stay* with us, *because* they change us
forever.

And those moments, as formative as they are, and as *strong* as they later make us
after we're done feeling *weak*,

They're not moments we like to remember.

Those humbling, small-making, moments we experience here and there---

---they're not images or sounds we like to reflect on too long in the quiet or in the dark.

Because in that dark, quiet place, there's just so much there.

Too much, sometimes, to handle all at once.

So instead, I guess I'll just lift us, in this moment of worship, to this space of *Lent*---

This time and place when we feel a *sense* of that lowness and lacking,

for the sake of soon being *lifted up*, and *filled* by the holy peace of God.

And our lectionary takes us there, too.

Our readings carry us to a place of *dry bones*. A place of *mourning*... don't they?

And it makes me wonder, if maybe all of this is okay.

Because those feelings aren't just mine...

they're yours, and they're the person's sitting next to you.

... So maybe all of it just works out to *work*. For all of us, together.

Each of us finds ourselves in a lot of broken places.

...Each of us, *together*, but so often feeling so *isolated* and alone,

a lot of times walks around with pieces of our broken hearts

just sort of floating around in our chests,

while we wait for things to come back together again. For a sense of being *whole* again.

And that's where our readings take us, today.

On this last Sunday of Lent, we're taken to that moment between *destruction*, and *renewal*.

--All of it taking place at once, inside the soul of God.

...All of us wrapped up in God's love, all the while.

So let's meditate on that for a little while, together,

while we're all in this room, together, listening for God, and reaching out.

Let's think for a second about that place we so often find ourselves

feeling collapsed and small, and *looking up*,

Just waiting for Life to pull the pieces together again. ...To that place of dry bones.

So often we feel there's no way any of it can ever be made good again.

We so often get stuck with this *tunnel vision*, in those moments of struggle,

Which leave us feeling alone, and destroyed.

In these moments, Christians have this bad habit of treating God

Like a waiter who got our *order* wrong. We get *huffed up* about it.

That anger even sometimes causing us to want to just get up and leave our seats all together---

promising to deliver an angry message to the manager.

Not good. And so far, I've noticed, that's not how it works. ...But still... we get angry.

Still, we ask ourselves---'how can God fix this? How can God make this right?

How can Life bring my scattered pieces back together again?'

'...When there's nothing left of me, how can God bring *something* out of *nothing*?'

And we fall into a sense of despair. ...But what's important for us to remember,

and what our readings today remind us of, is the fact that

In the midst of destruction, there is a holy power beyond anything we can see or even understand,

Which works constantly to bring life back into renewal.

---Something big. Something vast. Something breath-taking,

which forces us to see the work of God's glory all around us in the world.

And which forces us to finally notice the gorgeous place we stand

in the holy-whole of things.

Ya know, it doesn't take long to zoom out far enough from the ground,

to where each of us---our whole lives, and everything which bugs us,

and everything which inspires us, and every experience we've ever had---

---turns into line, then a dot, then something that can't be seen apart from the rest.

Then from there, moving from our planet, a fragment of piled rocks,

turning around the sun--- the sun, a single star, which floats along with many *billions* of stars,

around the center of our spiral galaxy--galaxy in which the hugeness of our sun

becomes just another unidentifiable speck amongst specks.

And we can and *should*, keep going, right?

From there, we can float out even *further*---into the depth of *Hubble*-sight, right?

Our galaxy is one of 200 *billion*, inside the known universe,
and it's not even the largest of them.

The largest galaxy known (so far), IC-10-11, is 6 *million* light years wide---
---*six times* the size of our own.

When we take a breath and a moment to look outside of ourselves,
into the depth of all that is God---*all things*---we start to notice
that our *big* problems are actually really very small. Very temporary.
---Even tinier than we feel when all of our dry bone pieces lie scattered.

...But that's not the point I'm hoping to move us toward, right now, in this time of
worship.

"Heeeaaard it," you might be saying in your mind.

And it's a good thing we have, because it's a beautiful truth.

But what I'm hoping we might consider together,
is not that what we go through doesn't *matter*, just because we're smaller than small.

But that *all things* matter, no matter how small--

--and *all things* are moved *always* within the life and moving breath of God.

I learned some amazing things about the Big Bang, the other day. Gave me goosebumps,
And lifted my sense of worship for God even higher than it was before.

Some Christians very oddly think the Big Bang somehow *destroys* the idea of God---
--and that's something I could never understand.

What happened in that one spectacular moment gives us a deeper,
and more beautiful and more astounding insight into the *heart* of God,
Than we could've ever seen or felt before the discovery of this mind-blowing event.
Looking into the Big Bang---the physical process of all things we know, coming to be---
we see that *everything* in the universe is made from matter
created in the first *seconds* of the Big Bang.

Every single thing we can touch or feel---the dirt under our feet,
the fibers in our hairbrush, the water we drink from the faucet---is 13.7 billion years old.
Each part only restructured and reorganized in different ways,
as Life keeps moving forward from that one first explosive, *pure* point of creation.
Astronomers and astrophysicists will even say that looking into that moment of creation
is the closest we can ever come to seeing the face of God.

It was a moment of those *tiniest* pieces gathering together
to form the vastness of all that is---all of the stars,
and solar systems, and galaxies, and you and me---floating through the whole of the
universe.

...And all of it comes *together*, to show us this crazy way
something can be created from *nothing*.

I found out the universe, at the moment of the Big Bang,
was just a super dense point---a *speck*---smaller than a *single atom*.
Everything, was compressed into a point of raging energy.

There wasn't even matter yet. Just this pure energy. This pure power.

The first force to emerge was gravity---gravity in ever-so-perfect proportion---
--which allowed things to come *together*, rather than rip apart.

...The tiniest factor, making things just right for creation to continue.

I learned that in so much less than a millionth of a *second*,

the universe expanded from the size of an atom to a baseball.

---In proportion, like a golf ball expanding to the size of the earth, in less than a second's time....

...The *tiniest* of things being moved and organized

by an indescribably powerful force, to bring *new* creation from *nothing*.

I also learned something else very important for us to consider,

from these tiny broken pieces. From the scattered pieces of these dry bones.

The energy of this explosion transformed into these itty-bitty fragments---

---subatomic particles as things started to cool off and move forward.

The pure energy of the universe, became *matter*. (Einstein's $E=mc^2$.)

And past this, something even cooler (no pun intended!)---

--when this matter was created, at the same time,

This other stuff---anti-matter---came to being, right along with it.

Stuff of a different charge---matter being positive, anti-matter being negative.

And antimatter, in that first glob of everything that is,

had the potential to entirely *destroy* the universe before it even fully came into being.

Equal amounts of matter and anti-matter would've canceled each other out.

But for every *billion* particles of *anti-matter* (the negative stuff),

there were a billion and ONE particles of *matter* (the positive stuff).

And that *one* extra particle in those measurements---
 --the smallest leftovers from this collision between matter and anti-matter---
 formed all things in the universe as we know it.
 ---All of *everything* we can see, or touch, or feel,
 being made up of this matter which spread from there,
 Spread out to form the galaxies, and solar systems,
 and stars, and planets, and the very bodies we now sit in over these chairs.

We are all matter coming from that one pure point of creation;
 and *everything*---no matter how small---*matters* because of this.
 And everything, we can see, and feel, and experience in this life,
 is moved and empowered, and given *life*, by the very same thing which made all things.
 By that pure power of creation. By that holy *energy*---
 ---the source of all things---which we call God.

So what's the point in all of this? This sanctuary isn't a science classroom.
 It's a place of *spirit*. ...I don't bring this stuff up, just because science is *cool*.
 I don't bring this up as *filler*---rambling on about whatever I could, just to pass the time.
 I bring this up because of those old, broken, dry bones, spoken of in Ezekiel.
 I bring this up because of that beautiful moment
 when Jesus stood outside the tomb, and cried for his friend,
 lifting his face to the sky, and asking God to help him do what he was about to do,
 so that other people, besides himself,

could know the awesome power and beauty and glory of the God who guides them.

I bring this up, because it points to that one point which made all things.

...*All* of it points us back to *God*,

and the overwhelming ways God moves each piece of your life

toward *new creation*, in every moment.

No matter how *tiny* we are. No matter how inconsequential we might feel.

No matter how isolated from all of the rest, we might sometimes think we are,

I bring this up to remind us that we are all a part of *One Thing*.

One holy and beautiful thing which leads us *always* to *new* places,

And carries us forward to wherever we'll go,

With the utmost *care*. With the utmost *precision*.

With the utmost *love* that comes to us as equally as it comes to any other thing.

...I bring this up to remind us that we *matter*. And that God is intimately a part of each of us

In the smallest and largest of ways, which go so far past our understanding,

we can't even begin to grasp the way God holds us.

These scripture readings start out in a place of dry bones, and mourning.

But they don't leave us there, do they?

No. In these moments of utter despair, and lacking, and loss---

--in these moments when it seemed all hope was *gone*, what happens?

In Ezekiel, God asks the prophet to tell the people

that from a pile of decayed bones, lying bare on the ground, God will give *new life*.

And Ezekiel, along with others, watches astounded as those bones

cover in tendons again. Then flesh on top of that.

...As *whole people* are formed again from all of those dead, broken pieces.

Our reading from John carries us to that miracle at the tomb,

when Lazarus, dead already *four days*--- already decaying--- *walks* out.

Leaving the tomb he stands up from where he was,

and pulls that burial cloth from his face, a whole person. A new person.

And all of this comes together, to remind us that in God *all things* are possible.

That in God, when we feel we've been broken down too small

to ever come back together into one, solid thing,

That from *nothing*, God and only God has the power to make *something*.

And not just *anything*, but some of the most beautiful,

and astounding, and heart-throbbing experiences of life we can imagine.

...Just like all of those other pieces of the universe,

stuff that makes our minds stand still,

and our breath spill out from our chests in shock and amazement.

As we travel together through these trying times of the season of Lent,

and through each of the trying seasons of our lives,

Remember that every *little* thing is always connected intimately to the heart of God.

Drinking from our water bottles, pulling into our throats the 13.7 billion year old stuff that came from the very center of the creation of the universe...

...remember the ways all things move in the spectacular order and love of the life of the holy,

Changing all of the time, from chaos to clarity.

From a *mess* to *amazement*. From the *negative* to the *positive*.

...From the scattered bones, to something whole again.

From death, to *new life*.

As you keep walking, remember that there are so *many* things ahead of you.

...And from this point of scattered pieces, as *all* things in God's created universe do,

we will watch in awe as somehow God—Life—

miraculously moves *all* things back together into something wholly *wonderful* to be seen.

Amen.