

Remember Who You Are

[Romans 6:3-11](#)

[Matthew 28:1-10](#)

When Jill was in her twenties she formed a close friendship with the retired Bishop of Los Angeles, Bishop Eric Bloy. At the end of an evening together, his parting words were always, “Remember who you are.” If we were to give a theme to this evening’s service it might be just that, “Remember who you are.”

During the first part of the service we symbolically brought the flame of Christ’s resurrection life back into the church after it has been sitting in the darkness of the tomb, and then listened to a rapid account of our salvation history – how Creation was made and blessed, how our spiritual ancestors were brought out of Egypt, and then God’s promise to give us new hearts, to bring life to the dry and dead and finally to gather God’s people together.

This is not just the story of God’s people thousands of years ago; it is our story as individuals and as an expression of the Body of Christ, here today. Each one of us has been created, each one of us has had experiences of exile, and each one of us has heard God calling us, promising us transformation, new life and a beloved community. We at St. Benedict’s have our own story of being created out of St. Peters, wondering in exile without a permanent home, and struggling to maintain our identity and indeed our very existence, but being called by God to a new life and a new expression of beloved community.

And today we are once again re-living the exile. We cannot gather as we long to, yet we know that there will be a time of restoration, as we heard in Zephaniah:

At that time I will bring you home,
at the time when I gather you;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes, says the LORD.

This account of how God and God’s people travel together, this account of God’s faithfulness is a reminder of who we are. We are a pilgrim people; we are a people beloved of God, built on the divine promise.

And then after we declared the resurrection of the Lord, we moved to the resurrection readings – Matthew’s account of early the first Easter morning, and Paul’s discussion of how we participate in the resurrection, how through our baptism we are made resurrection people.

Remember who we are! We are resurrection people.

Paul's discussion of baptism follows on from the previous chapter of Romans where he has been saying that grace is the astonishing gift of God given to us freely regardless of our failure to live up to God's standards – regardless of our sin. And he asked rhetorically, "If grace is given to us to reconcile us to God when we sin, should we sin more so that grace may be even more abundant?"

And of course, the answer to that questions would be "no".

Now we pick up his thread of thought with the reading Lorienne just read. In our baptism we died and rose again with Christ; in our baptism we became partakers in his death and resurrection, his triumph over sin and death. So remember who you are, says Paul, remember that you have died to sin. So just don't do it!

You are no longer unconsciously distanced from God – you have been brought into God's beloved community, you have been made one with Christ. In your baptism you are sealed as Christ's own for ever – so live like it's true, don't carry on the way you were before, live without sin! Because you have died with Christ, you are dead to sin so why bring it to life all the time – why resuscitate sin?

Now, if you are like me, and I know you are, you continue to sin. If we didn't we would not need to make our common confession as we do most Sunday mornings. If we didn't sin, we would already be fully Christ-like beings. So it's a journey, a project for the Holy Spirit working in our hearts.

Many of us go through times of intense struggle, times when it seems like the body of sin is not dead at all. Remember that horrible scene in the 1987 film Fatal Attraction where Glenn Close's character has been drowned in the bath tub to the great relief of us all, and then she suddenly sits up? That's how the sin matrix is for most of us. We just think our baptism is finally working and sin has been killed in the bath tub when Whoa! it pops up unexpectedly and we are back to square one.

Except that we are not. We are on a spiral. Spiritual maturity is a spiral path where we keep hitting the same issues, the same places where the Holy Spirit challenges us. But imperceptibly over time miracles of healing happen and new challenges arise. It is not always struggle. There are times of blessing and times of quiet. And then we see new places where we need healing - new friendships, new insights challenge old perceptions, our theology gets too small and we have to struggle anew.

Mountain top experiences come and go.

But remember who we are! The fundamental truths remain the same.

We have been called to be the people of God, we have been called to be an expression of Christ's Body in Los Osos and beyond. We have been gathered back from exile, we have been given hearts of flesh, we have been given beloved community and made one in Christ. That is who we are.

We are the resurrection people. We know that death is passing and resurrection always come. We know that grief is followed by joy. Sometimes we can't find that truth in our own lives, sometimes the grief is so great that resurrection seems a distant hope or even a ridiculous myth – that is when we most need the faith community to keep the hope for us. That is when we need each other to light the new fire and to nurture it.

Even in the darkest times, we remember the light burning in the darkness. We remember Jesus saying “I am the light of the world,” Jesus saying “You are the light of the world.” We remember the women at first light going to grieve at the tomb only to have their lives rocked by an earthquake and the angel as bright as lightening saying, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised,”

But tonight, two millennia later we can say “We are not afraid; we are following Jesus who was crucified. He is here, and now, among us; for he has been raised! Alleluia!”

Remember who we are; remember who you are.