

I love this service. It is like a beginner's guide to Christian initiation. Fire and water; word and sacrament; bread and wine; creation, sacrifice and resurrection. All wrapped up in about 90 minutes.

We have been remembering together, remembering the work of God with God's people through the millennia – first God created the cosmos and humanity as an integral part of the total picture – a people made in God's own image; then we skipped Noah coming through the great waters of the flood and went on to hear how God saved the Hebrews who had become slaves in the empire of Egypt by parting the waters for them to reach safety; and then we fast forwarded to some of the great visions of Ezekiel after the people of Israel had again been taken into captivity, this time in Babylon. And Ezekiel saw the people of God like a valley of bones, just bones, but the Spirit of God blew through the valley, bringing the people back to life; and we ended with that great promise of a new heart and a new spirit!

Soon we will be celebrating the incarnation and resurrection of God in Jesus the Christ but right now we are poised on the edge. It is still dark. We have heard our salvation history. We have been reminded of the great scope of God's work among humanity and now is the time of decision. Have we just heard a nice story? and will we leave here no different than when we came in? Or have we heard with the ears of our hearts? Are we allowing it to sink in?

This great narrative is more than just the story of an ancient people. This is our story. As the people of God today in Los Osos and beyond, as the people whom Jesus has called to follow him, to be his disciples, this is also our story, both personally and as a faith community. We have been created in God's image with creativity and consciousness; we have been held hostage by the trappings of Empire and by all the damage humans do to one another in families and organizations; we have been given a new life – one which at times has become dry and meaningless but

God's Spirit at work in our hearts and minds, is constantly making us new, constantly greening us as Hildegarde would say.

This is our story.

We can just leave it there, like a story told at Thanksgiving by a great uncle after several glasses of wine - we can just leave it on the table.

Or we can choose to use it as a springboard to renew our own vows to follow Jesus. These vows are not something to be taken lightly. Being the disciples of Jesus, the people of God, is not an easy calling. You heard how the Hebrews were made slaves, you know that the visions of Ezekiel were spoken to a frightened and scattered people, some captives in Babylon others refugees throughout the Mediterranean. Being twice born does not mean that you are always living "in the zone", drawing grace and ease to your self.

We only have to look at Jesus to know that being his disciple is at times going to be hard. And yet we are drawn to follow him; to allow the Spirit of God to work in our hearts and minds, giving us not just any old new heart but God's heart, making us Christ-like.

On Sundays we regularly use a passage from Philippians as our statement of Faith. We will tomorrow morning. It starts like this, "Though he was divine, he did not cling to equality with God, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a slave." But that's not quite what Paul wrote. He wrote, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was divine, did not cling to equality with God, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a slave." *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.* That is our challenge tonight. Will we allow the Spirit of God to work in us, not just to bring new life and new hope but to give us the same mind as was in Christ Jesus?

My friends, this is what it's all about. Becoming like Christ. *Theosis* is

the Greek term – union with God. We never stop being created beings and, in that sense, different from God; but in Jesus Christ, God and human were made one and so as we allow ourselves to become more and more Christ-like so the life of union with God which was manifest in Jesus becomes manifest in us.

Are you willing to allow the Holy Spirit to create in you the same mind that was in Christ Jesus? This is more than imitation – trying to live like Jesus - this is transformation into Christ. It is change at the very core of our beings as we live in ourselves the reconciliation between earth and heaven that Jesus brought. It is what our spirits crave.

The good news my friends is that the Spirit has already started. In a few minutes we will be reminding ourselves that we have passed through the waters of baptism, that we have been marked as Christ's own for ever. We are already twice-born.

But we get to choose. Will we take the next step?

I don't know what the next step is for you. I don't even know what it is for myself. But whatever it is, I know it requires commitment. I know it requires surrender. I know it requires allowing the Holy Spirit to transform us and at the same time being willing to play an active role in that process. For we are never just passive, watching God work. We are active participants. Active participants in our own transformation and active participants in the transformation of our world.

We are made in God's image with consciousness and creativity. And so we get to co-create with God. We do this in prayer and we do it in action. And in the process we can become more and more Christ-like.

As I may have mentioned before, in the ancient story, Abbot Lot came to Abbot Joseph and said: Father, according as I am able, I keep my little rule, and my little fast, my prayer, meditation and contemplative silence; and according as I am able I strive to cleanse my heart of thoughts: now what more should I do? The elder rose up in reply and stretched out his hands to heaven, and his fingers became like ten lamps of fire. He said: Why not become entirely fire?