

A Sermon for Robbinsdale United Church of Christ
March 8, 2008 – 5th Sunday in Lent
Rev. T. Michael Rock

Scripture Readings – Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Romans 8:6-11

Sermon Title: “Coming to Life”

(open with prayer)

Introduction:

First, lets recap a little of what has happened in the pulpit here at RUCC during this season of Lent. Our first Sunday we began to explore sin and grace and learned a valuable lesson about our own sin as a state of our being and not anything associated with guilt or shame. We are free to sin and free to accept the gift of God's grace. We are free to live separate from God, or as close to God as we choose. There are no barriers to this except our choice. This has been the foundation of our Lenten journey. We are broken, but there is hope in our journey toward wholeness. The next Sunday, Dwight helped us along this road by unpacking this “born again” language. To be born again is not a phrase that belongs to the radical religious right, but one that we can use about real change and transformation in our own lives. Something new is brewing and a birth is on its way. And since Dwight did such a good job with being “born again” I came the next week and we talked about being saved, another word that does not belong to the Christian right, but one that we can use to describe our own healing journey from suffering to hope. We are all saved, because we have found this community in the midst of our sufferings, and some of us have found our way back here time and time again. We are saved, not by some words in a prayer, but by our free exchange of love and compassion. The healing journey continued last week as Dwight came back to the pulpit and reminded us again that there are no limits on love. We were reminded that it didn't matter if we were mudites or not, Jesus would enter our lives, and implore us to cast aside labels and other artificial barriers and do what is right for the good of all. Love triumphs this Lent. So, I enter this sermon recap because it is important to remember that we are forgiven, and born again, and saved, and called to love. It is important because we need to be grounded in this language before open ourselves up the vision of Ezekiel, the prophecy of Paul, and the raising of Lazarus.

All of these texts tell the truth of life after death. These are the texts of ghosts, and spirits, and the afterlife. These are texts that keep us up at night because they visit from beyond the grave. (cue spooky music) So remember, that you are forgiven and made whole by God' grace, if you

are open to something new you are in the process of being born again, you are saved by compassion and love of those around you, and all barriers are broken down by the limitless love of God. These fundamental truths will increase our faith, inspire us to serve, and lead us in love of God, ourselves and our neighbors. These fundamental truths will help us to see that the greatest power we could ever imagine is the power we share of those who have died. It is in despair over a field of bones and a stench of death that God commands Ezekiel to prophecy to those bones. It is the lack of faith of the Romans that Paul implores them not to rely on the temporary nature of things you can touch but to rely on the eternal nature of the spirit and soul of Christ. The story we didn't read in this cycle is Lazarus coming out of the tomb in the clearest example of all that Christ may have been a healer, teacher and prophet among the living, he is the ruler and commander of those who have died.

We don't often count the dead among the important folks in our community, but they may be our most valuable members. First of all, there are more of them than there are of us. They started this congregation, nurtured it through hard times and carried the vision of this building. They gave in the offering every week and many left gifts to the church at the time of their death. Their energy is what fills the pews on the coldest winter mornings when some of the living folks stay home and read the paper, and they are the ones here in the humidity of August when many of us find safety in the comfort of Central Air, or the breeze off the lake. It is their spirit that guides our mission, our caring, and our love. It is by their example that many of us have found our faith and been healed by this community. And, it is not just the dead members of RUCG, it is the memory and spirit of every person close to us who has died. It is the cloud of witnesses that you walk into worship with every Sunday that help us to understand that we are not alone. The vision of the bones coming to life and growing muscles and skin and dancing is a vision to remind the church that our greatest asset is often resting in those who have gone before us. Our greatest strength is in the collective wisdom of those who have sung in the choirs, scrubbed the floors, balanced the checkbooks, and shook hands at the doors.

It is through their wisdom and vision, that we never allow the status quo to guide our future. The leaders in our past understood the importance of change. Their living is a testimony that change will happen whether we want it to, or not. Their living and moving among us gives us the clear direction and persuasive argument to embrace change, welcome change and facilitate change. Try on a new way of being, the bones cry out. Try on a new way of being, the spirit says. Try on a new way of being, says Lazarus as he walks out of the tomb in which he was laid.

This weekend there are twelve of us exploring the transformation power of soul force and active nonviolence. Our journey the past couple

of days has been about trying something new, changing our approach to life and making something happen using the strategies of nonviolence. This weekend we have been open to even the possibility that to learn from the past and from those who have gone before is also one of our greatest assets. This morning, as we celebrate the ministry of Kathy Plumb, lift up the coming of age of Matthew Anderson, welcome one who was called by name, Amanda Sonquist, and remember one whose body is gone, but Spirit lives, Eleanor Evans, I want each one of us to see in this room the Spirits of those who sat in the pews. I want each of us to realize the power of life that is carried in the cloud of witnesses. We are never alone here in this space because the cloud of witnesses accompanies everywhere. The bones came to life, the spirit never dies, and Christ commands even the dead. The good news this morning is about experimenting with the truth that here in this space we are learning how to live along with the thousands of others who crowd these pews. We are coming to life. We are on our way to understanding, and we are ready once again to expand our faith to reach beyond our finite limits of time and space. It is the example Christ gives, Paul teaches, and Ezekiel sees: The living and the dead are always coming to life.

AMEN.