

March 30, 2008

Acts 2:14, 22-32; Psalm 16 1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

The past couple weekends, the USA channel has shown the movie 8 Below. I venture out here on thin ice, because when I asked the Confirmation students if they has seen it ... it is a Disney Movie ... they had not. But, its images keep coming to mind as I dwelled with the text for today, so I'll try my best to make the images come alive for you as well, so we can ponder together what the resurrection does for us.

So, the movie ... basically, it is about a wilderness guide and his team of 8 sled dogs, who are working at an Antarctic science research station. Their job is to transport, guide and keep safe, the researchers who come down and study the region. The movie begins with a scientist arriving, who needs to be taken to a location the guide believes is too dangerous. Against his better judgment, he does what his boss tells him and takes this scientist out into the snowy, always changing wilderness of Antarctica, so this scientist can achieve his lifelong dream.

The guide sees and knows the dangers. The scientist just sees endless snow and ice and the nearness of accomplishing his life-long pursuit. Even though the scientist has just met the guide and the dogs, he needs to trust them completely to accomplish the goal he's come all this way to achieve.

Wandering off, impulsively stepping in the wrong place, and not respecting the wilds around them could quickly lead to death.

On the way back, the guide stops to tend to the feet of one of the dogs, when the base calls on the radio. The scientist takes the call. The reception is bad, so like we all do ... he moved around to get a better signal. Focused on

hearing the radio, he doesn't watch where he's stepping and suddenly the snow gives way under his feet. He falls ... 20-30 feet, breaking his leg. In his fear and pain, the scientist tries to move and check out his injury, unaware of the greater danger he is in. The guide both sees and hears the cracking of thin ice. He yells at the scientist not to move, but before either could do much more, the scientist feels the ice break open underneath and he drops into the icy waters below.

Again, survival mode kicks in and he starts treading water, trying not to drown. But, the guide yells down, "Stop treading water. Put your arms on the ice and you will freeze to it. The ice will hold you. You'll drown faster than you'll freeze. Stop trying to get yourself out." The scientist does what he is told, but it is hard not to want to do something to try to save himself. In the mean time, the guide gets the dogs, connects them in a way that provides an anchor, and sends his lead dog Maija with a looped rope, out on the ice. With assuring words and instructions to the dog that the guide has her, she crawls out to the scientist and puts the loop over his head. ... Once the rope is secure around the scientist's body, the guide and dogs pull him to safety; saving his life.

The crazy thing, when I pondered this scene and as I heard the text, this familiar story about good old doubting Thomas, ... I started doing the very thing that the resurrection is inviting and commanding us not to do; tread water. You know how the story goes, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of nails in his hands, I will not believe."

For me, it is hearing so many cries for help, seeing the way so many are so valiantly treading water, ... the desire to my job well ... and offer something,

anything or exactly what you are asking for ... so you can get out and live in the resurrection promise we witnessed last week. It is so tempting to believe that I am responsible for all this. ... I focused in on Thomas and if he had just believed, then he would have known the joy of Christ sooner, ... rather than spend a week in those freezing waters without the resurrection hope and way of life. And the edge of the ice kept breaking away, ... so I kept treading water harder and holding on tighter, thinking if my words could just be more persuasive, ... if I could just serve more people, be more places ... then they could see ... then they would believe

What drives your treading of water? When you get up in the morning, what is the do list that if you get it all done, then you'll be able to pull yourself up on thicker ice and rest or feel safe or unsure that your family and those closest around you, either won't fall in ... or you can give them the tools they need to get out themselves. I see you juggling work, starting families, raising young children, constantly worried about your older children and hoping you have done enough, ... I see relationships struggling, battles with illness, ... frustration, fear, resignation or resistance to the forces of aging, ... and gurgling community dynamics that tug and pull for your attention. ... But, I also see some of you making your way, oblivious to all this or the dangers around you and resistant to the boundaries and warnings others give you, as long as you can get what you want and accomplish it on your own.

Who wouldn't want a way out of all this ... and a means of instruction to do it without drowning, without feeling so tired, ... without it all depending upon your strong shoulders.

Then a voice enters in the noise and the splashing, "Stop treading water. Peace be with you."

Did you notice what was missing in that whole reflection upon our crazy lives? God. You or I are the subject, actor of every one of those sentences. Even when we are talking about God, all our statements begin with “I”, instead of “God”. “Until I see...” or “If only I believed more” ... Or “If I did more or did it better” ... It is our greatest sin, making the world revolve around us. Either we leave God out of the story all together, boasting of our own abilities. Or we relegate God as the one, who stands safely up on the ledge above, shouting down how stupid we were for not following God’s ways and getting in such a bad spot. But, since we cried for help loudly enough, God comes and gives us instructions that if we follow properly, then we will be able to pull ourselves out of the icy hole. In some cases, God sticks around and cheers us on, but in most scenarios, once the word of instruction is given, God leaves and we should be able to make it the rest of the way on our own.

While this is the way human beings respond to each other and envision the way the world works, this is not God’s way or who God is. So, God sent us Jesus to be our guide and savior. In Christ, we see that our God is not one to stand far off and watch God’s people struggling, but while we were yet sinners ... treading for dear life, God sends us Jesus, across the thin ice and he pulls us out, ... even though our struggling and fighting and insistence to do it on our own, causes him to go under, even die ... he doesn’t stop until we are safely on solid ground.

Our Scripture reveals this to us today. It is the part we skip over, as we get fixated on Thomas. It was late on that first day of the week. The disciples are hiding behind a locked door. “The friends, who knew Jesus best, who had betrayed him, who had pretended they didn’t know him, who had run away when he was dying, who hid when he was arrested [to save themselves], who

were frightened, [confused], ashamed, [and didn't believe the women's eye witness account of Jesus being alive]"¹ ... so it wasn't just Thomas, who was doubting. No, all of them stopped following Jesus' way, once they lost sight of their Lord.

Yet, when "Jesus appeared among them, [he doesn't do what we expect from God in the face of disobedience]. Jesus greets them. He didn't say, 'What happened?' 'Where were you?' [Why are you hiding here? Didn't you get anything I said when I was with you?] 'You really screwed up.' No, he comes to his disciples, who are distressed and weary and unsure of where to go and greets them by saying, "Peace be with you." Jesus"² even comes among those of you who don't think you are lost, but insist on being the actor and beginning of your every sentence ... " Jesus greets you saying, 'Peace be with you. Stop treading water. I will get you out.'

And I know, it isn't what you want to hear when you feel like you are drowning and the conditions around you are freezing, but resurrection first and foremost proclaims God is the only one who can get you out. Just as God raised Jesus up, having freed him from death, God sends you the risen Christ with the power of the Holy Spirit to secure the rope around you and pull you into new life.

Not sure how to stop treading water or you want to better follow Jesus' footsteps ... we are going to explore this more in the following Sundays, but for now begin and travel through your day in prayer. Pray as Jesus did in the garden, just before he was arrested, "Not my will God, but your will be done."

¹ Dykstra, Laurel A., "Living the Word: Peace be With You", *Sojourners* (March 2008) p 49.

² *Ibid.* quoted and paraphrased

Pray as the blind man did to Jesus, “Open my eyes, so I may see you go before me.” And then lift all those things placing demands on your life, and each day ask God to show you the things you can change, the things you can’t and shouldn’t even try to do anything about, and the wisdom to know the difference. Besides the Lord’s Prayer, the serenity prayer is one that can never steer you wrong.

Let your prayers be the means to get the subject of your sentences and the actor of your life in the right order. Jesus is the savior of the world. You are not. For as the Psalmist proclaimed long ago, God has made known to you the ways of life in and through his Son and with Him as your guide, even when you stumble or get lost or become too weary, he comes to you and restores you to new life. In this you may hope and rejoice, and know peace, this day and forever. Amen.