

MINE !!!

Acts 9:36-43 April 25, 2010

Earth Sunday

Ok, even though it stretches our sense of reality, for arguments sake let's say that Peter really did resuscitate Tabitha and bring her back from the dead.

It could have been that she was just in a coma, or one of those physical states where doctors think you're dead, but you're not.

It could have been that Peter just some how brought her out of one of these states, but like I said, just for arguments sake, let's say he actually brought her back from the dead.

Why? WHY? Why would he do that?

During lent the Lenten study group was watching movies about Jesus and when it came to that scene about Jesus raising Lazarus. Everyone seemed to have the same question – WHY?

I mean if death is all it's made out to be – then why?

I still think that it is a really horrible showing for a country that people want to call Christian-- the fact that we spend 70%, Seventy percent, of all Medicare spending on keeping people alive the last 2 weeks of their lives.

I mean, if life after death is really the spiritual amusement park that traditional Christianity has made it out to be, then why aren't folk lining up like they do at Disneyland.

Or, at least why are they, or more often their surviving families, fighting death so hard.

This isn't to say you just give up at the first sign of trouble.

If there's any, ANY hope for some extended quality living, then give it all you've got.

But what kind of faith are we showing when we treat death as the absolutely worse thing that can happen to a person?

So, here's poor Tabitha, she's been dead a little while now and she was supposedly a wonderful disciple and clearly worthy of all the glories of heaven.

So you gotta figure that she's moved on and is just having one heck of a good time in heaven, when she gets this call that she's gotta go show up for some more earthly suffering.

With friends like Peter, who needs enemies.

It's not like she's **not** going to die again.

She might live a few more years, but just like everyone else, she's gonna die.

So why do it?

Why did Peter show up and ruin her heavenly party?

To be honest – I don't know;
but I've got an idea about why.

It was all PR – marketing;
advertising that makes the folks on Madison Avenue look like a bunch of beginners.

I don't want this to sound too cynical, because it really isn't meant to be.

And the idea comes right from the scripture.

After Tabitha returned to this world and got out of bed, the next line in the scripture says, “This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.”

I think Peter did it so that others may come to believe in the teachings of Jesus and the power of God’s spirit in the disciples.

I was a great advertisement for all that the disciples were trying to share with the world. But -- there was another lesson here to be learned.

This is the real lesson to be learned.

We must understand that this all seems very unfair to poor Tabitha, who was like on an eternal luxury vacation in Tahiti when she gets called back to go live in a disease ridden, barely subsistence level of life.

To live in 1st century Palestine was to suffer.

She had to be crying – It was mine, mine, mine and you took it away from me.

Give it back, it’s mine.

It’s my life, you can’t just move me around like that.

Probably the second word a child learns after they learn the word “no,” is the word “mine.”

In our possession driven society and culture, children very early on learn the concept of “mine.”

And without a doubt, by the time a child reaches adolescence they are quite aware and certain that their body, their life, their very being is a personal possession.

“It’s my life and I’ll do what I want.”

Come on – we all said it at one time or another and a good many of us have heard it.

But what Tabitha teaches us is that – that notion is wrong.

There is no such thing as -- “mine.”

Oh... does that sound un-American?

Maybe – but it’s very Christian and we’d be a much better country if we all came to understand this.

No – I’m not preaching socialism – I’m preaching a different frame of mind – the mind of Christ.

You see, right from our youthful beginnings we get this idea in our heads that we can possess things, but the reality is that the closest we can get to that -- is that we can be stewards.

We can be the responsible caretakers.
We are just stewards, even of something as basic
as our selves.

The apostle Paul makes this very clear in his
letter to the church in Rome when he writes:

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to
ourselves.

If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the
Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die,
we are the Lord's. [Rom 14:7-8]

Of even ourselves, we are merely stewards.
Ownership belongs to God and God alone.

So I'm guessing that Tabitha's little jaunt in
heaven probably made her very aware of the
reality of Godly ownership and she was quite
aware that her return to this life was not a
violation of any of her rights.

For whether we live or whether we die, we are
the Lord's.

I will admit and agree that this is a radical
change from the way we usually think.

“It’s my party and I’ll cry if I want to.”

But – “I did it my way.”

All of our laws are at their most primitive level property laws, protecting or defining rights of ownership.

It is the paradigm we are taught to live in from infancy.

As George Harrison pointed out –

All thru' the day I me mine, I me mine, I me mine.
All thru' the night I me mine, I me mine, I me mine.
Now they're frightened of leaving it
Ev'ryone's weaving it,
Coming on strong all the time,
All thru' the day I me mine.
I-I-me-me mine,

All I can hear I me mine, I me mine, I me mine.
Even those tears I me mine, I me mine, I me mine.
No-one's frightened of playing it
Ev'ryone's saying it,
Flowing more freely than wine,
All thru' Your life, I me mine.
I-I-me-me mine.

It’s so much a part of our life that is like just breathing the air -- we totally forget that if Paul and Jesus are right, then it’s just an illusion.

Jesus reminds us of this illusion of 'personal possession' when he tells the following parable.

"The land of a rich man produced abundantly.

And he thought to himself,

'What should I do, for I have no place to store **my** crops?'

Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down **my** barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all **my** grain and **my** goods.

And I will say to **my** soul,

'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'

But God said to him,

'You fool! This very night **your** life is being **demande**d of you.

And the things you have prepared, **whose** will **they** be?' [Luke 12:16-20]

We are but stewards;
of even our lives, we are but stewards.

Living or dying we are part of an eternal matrix.

If you would please, join me in a hymn from our hymnals, but we're not going to sing, I just want you to read along so that we can pay attention to the words so profoundly crafted by Brian Wren.

We are not our own. Earth forms us,
human leaves on nature's growing vine,
fruit of many generations,
seeds of life divine.

We are not alone. Earth names us:
past and present, peoples near and far,
family and friends and strangers
show us who we are.

Through a human life God finds us;
dying, living, love is fully known,
and in bread and wine reminds us:
we are not our own.

Therefore let us make thanksgiving,
and with justice, willing and aware,
give to earth, and all things living,
liturgies of care.

And if love's encounters lead us
on a way uncertain and unknown,
all the saints with prayer surround us:
We are not alone.

Let us be a house of welcome,
living stone upholding living stone,
gladly showing all our neighbours
we are not our own!

This past Thursday, I'm sure everyone knows was Earth Day.

It is a day when we are called to remember, as Ruth Duck writes, that:

We cannot own the sunlit sky, the moon, the wild flowers growing,
for we are part of all that is within life's river flowing.

With open hands receive and share the gifts of God's creation,
that all may have abundant life in every earthly nation.

Earth Day is a day to face reality.
It is a day to reveal the illusion of "Mine."

At the beginning of this sermon I said that it stretches our sense of reality to think that Peter actually brought Tabitha back from the dead. But it seems to stretch our imaginations even farther to think that there...
really -- is -- no -- "mine."

We are so deluded by a culture of possession that we have real difficulty **moving beyond** the paradigm of "mine."

Everything we do, everything we see around us, the laws that govern us, how we were brought up as kids, our economic system, our government are all founded on the illusion of "mine."

It is so ingrained in us that we become simply blind to reality.

Our society and culture have constructed a fantasy world where everything works in the context of “mine.”

It is an illusion which is the source of so much pain, suffering and destruction.

What Jesus and Paul are calling us to do, what the still speaking Spirit of God is calling us to do, is to repent, to move beyond the illusion and open our eyes and see, that whether we live or whether we die, we are not our own, we are the Lord's.

AMEN.