

ST. FRANCIS EPISCOPAL CHURCH
VICTORIA, TEXAS

Holy Tuesday, 2009

John 12:20-36

The Reverend Faith Bledsoe

This wasn't the first time we had heard this language from Jesus – this whole business of being lifted up. The night that Pharisee Nicodemus came to visit, Jesus compared himself to the serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness. That day on the Sea of Tiberius, in his teaching about the bread of life, he spoke of raising up on the last day all those who believe. Then there was that teaching at the Festival of Booths when he said we would be the ones to lift up the Son of Man and that he was the Son of Man! No, it's not the first time, and still it's confusing – all that stuff about falling into the earth and being lifted up.

I am Joanna, the widow of Chuza, the past finance minister of Herod's court. I know what it is to live the good life; to be surrounded by wealth; to speak and have it be done for you; to ask and have it provided. It sounds like a pleasant life and yet the politics and capriciousness of the court was frustrating and dangerous.

After Chuza's death, without the power of his position, I was vulnerable to the whims of the court. The decision to follow Jesus was easy really. I had had enough of court games and gossip and endless days of quiet leisure. Jesus spoke with authenticity and respect for the crowds who listened. This was clearly no game for him. I had the sense that following him meant I would grow more deeply into myself and I was ready. In joining up with Jesus and his followers, I was able to put my wealth to good use, buying food and supplies when we needed them. For the first time I was grateful for such riches, not for what it bought me, but for how it served those on the Way.

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Fall and be lifted up. I think the Pharisee, Nicodemus might have heard this as giving up. That's how I heard it the first time. Jesus never asked for my money. He never made me hand it over. It was in watching him give of himself over and over and over that I learned. I learned this was not about giving up but about giving in. It's about going where the grain is supposed to go, even when that's into the darkness. It's about falling into the ground so that finally, fruitfully, it is lifted up.

I did not give up my wealth in following Jesus. But I have come to understand that in sharing it there is a wealth of the heart that grows and bears even more fruit. I knew how to hoard and hold wealth. Sharing it was another matter; and yet Jesus continued to invite me into the very practice that I shrank from. When I realized it was less about releasing my grip on my riches and more about inviting others to share in them, I stopped wrestling so hard.

Jesus reminded us that the cure of a snakebite for those in the desert lay in looking upon a serpent. Perhaps we find our cure not by shrinking from what besets, befuddles and daunts us, but by falling deeper into those very places, and finding the treasure that God has placed there. And the result of such falling is being lifted up.

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