

## A reflection on the readings for Holy Saturday 2008

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“Mortal can these bones live?”

One of the most recent translations of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible begins thus, “When God was about to create heaven and earth, the earth was chaos, unformed, and on the chaotic water’s face was darkness.” In other words before God’s creative desire there was nothing. It is only through God’s creative and genitive force that existence exists. It is only when God speaks that existence takes on meaning. God speaks and chaos flees, that which was not, solidifies in to that which is. God speaks and darkness becomes light. God speaks and dust becomes human, and then God speaks to that which he created, God makes God’s creation, us, aware...aware of its creator.

To what purpose does God create and make aware? Kathryn Tanner says “In establishing the world in relationship to Godself, God’s intent is to communicate [undivided Goodness] to us. The history of the world is God’s working for the fuller bestowal of such gifts... [with] creation, covenant, [and] salvation in Christ [each] representing a greater communication of goodness to the creature and the overcoming of any sinful opposition to these gifts’ distribution”<sup>1</sup> The entire history of creation and salvation contained in the Bible and beyond is the playing out of God’s desire to communicate to God’s creation God’s desire to show us, God’s creatures, God’s goodness. This is a bold answer to

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<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity – A Brief Systematic Theology*. (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2005), 2

the ultimate question isn't it? Why are we here...to receive God's goodness...period.

Sarah laughs when she is told that she will bear a child at age ninety something. She laughs because it is funny, because to her it is an absurdity; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Rabbi Samson Hirsch said, "The entire beginning of the Jewish people is laughable. God began the realization of his promise only after all human hope had come to an end."<sup>2</sup> It's an absurdity that we exist at all, yet God spoke and we were and we are. It's an absurdity that God's purpose is only to show us God's goodness, yet...Sarah bears a Child Isaac, Yitzhak in Hebrew, meaning to laugh. A reflection of God's goodness when all her human hope had come to an end.

It is when human hope comes to an end that God acts to remind us of God's goodness. God said to Ezekiel, when he surveys the death and destruction all around him, "mortal can these bones live?" He says to Ezekiel prophesy!; "Come from the four winds O breath and breathe upon these slain that they may live... and breath came into them and they lived and stood on their feet." The Israelites in their exodus from Egypt clamour to Moses; "Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness," and the seas were parted and they lived.

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<sup>2</sup> Samson Raphael Hirsch, in *The Torah – A Modern Commentary* ed. G. Plaut (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 2005), 143-144.

We fail to see so often. We fail to see God's goodness even though it is manifest time and again. The gift of creation, the gift of children, the gift of rescue from insurmountable adversity, the gift of life even when all around is death and dry bones. We fail to see...So God in God's goodness came among us. But... "my thoughts are not your thoughts nor are your ways my ways," says God. God doesn't come as some radiant cloud being upon whose face we cannot look. God does not come to start over and instantly transform this broken world. God loves us as we are, God loves us as God spoke us into existence in god's own image. God comes as one who was despised and rejected by others, a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity one from whom others hid their faces and whom they held of no account. The least of the least, he was cut off from the land of the living and finally his grave made with the wicked. God is dead, here ends all human hope. God is in the grave.

God is in the grave, the end of all human hope, yet..."So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. That which I purpose, the thing for which I sent it... God's goodness, even in the grave. When all human hope ceases when existence comes to an end in our limited understanding, God acts. God transforms the chaos of non-existence into being, the dust into humanity, barrenness into fertility, slavery into freedom, dry and rattling bones into the living the breathing the standing. God is in the grave yet even this God transforms. God beckons to us from beyond the grave, from beyond the end of all hope, God's goodness calls us, mortal can these bones live?

God is in the grave because even in the grave God transforms death into life. We live beyond hope, we live in God's hope. Mortal can these bones live?