

“Will We Be *Boring* or Will We Be *Hoisting*?”

(What Will the Future Hold?)

Jeremiah 31:7-14 & John 1:1-18

Sermon by Jan Edmiston

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Several months ago, someone knocked on my door at church and said, “Have you heard from the boring company?”

Which boring company would *that* be? I was thinking about insurance companies and cleaning products companies and curriculum companies – all of whom call on the church and try to sell us things. (And apologies to you if you happen to sell insurance or cleaning products or curriculum – it’s probably not boring to you.)

“No. No, the *boring* company,” she said. “The company that’s *boring* today.” I still didn’t get it.

She was talking about the men who were coming to (literally) bore some holes into the earth with big, loud machinery. In the future, we hope to install an elevator that will take us from the basement to the second story. and we had to hire a *boring* company as part of the process of preparing for an elevator.

Maybe you consider the church to be a terribly boring company. And maybe you’ve spent some time over the holidays with some boring people. But in this context, boring involves looking *down* into the deep earth.

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Or maybe you prefer to look *up*.

Long before our encounter with the boring company, a group of us sat in a meeting with a representative from the Austin Organ Company and we were making some final decisions about the pipe organ that will be installed in the balcony behind you later this month.

The organ had been chosen. The pipe colors had been selected. The payment plan had been approved. At last, we were dealing with the final details before scheduling the delivery.

But then the Austin Organ man asked a question that many of us found funny: “What’s the name of your hoisting company?” he said.

And we looked at each other wondering if anyone had the answer to that question. “What’s the name of your hoisting company?” as if everybody has one.

People looked around at each other and finally someone said, “We don’t really do much hoisting.”

But apparently, when the boxes of pipes and pieces come in two weeks, we will need them hoisted from ground level up into the balcony.

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You can probably imagine – if you don’t already know – what goes on in a church building Monday – Saturday each week. People are meeting and praying and talking and planning. But now we know that with changes around here, there will also be boring and hoisting. And it got me thinking: this is a metaphor for us too.

With a new year, we ponder the changes before us. Some of them are exciting. Some of them fill us with dread. Will we be boring? Or will we be hoisting?

In other words, will we be looking *down*? Or will we be looking *up*? Will we be digging in, concentrating on what’s down here in the earth and on the earth? Or will we be more interested in lifting ourselves and others *up* to some new height?

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Listen again to the prophet Jeremiah:

The Lord is telling his children to *raise shouts* to the chief of the nations! God has arranged a great reunion and all God’s children are coming home. They are coming home from Iraq! (Actually in those days, they called it Babylon.)

But it was current day Iraq – the nation where they had been exiled for about 70 years. Once they had been scattered and sick and parched like the desert. But God was calling them home. And soon – very soon – they would sing on top of Mount Zion!

(Actually in those days and today, Mount Zion was another name for Jerusalem.) Jerusalem is on a hill. The only way to get there is up. The only way to see where you’re headed is to look up.

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In yesterday’s paper, there was a photograph of a fisherwoman in India reaching up into the sky with her fingers spread and her face pleading. I thought at first she was looking to God for divine help.

But the caption said that she was reaching up toward a hovering helicopter for food. The truth is that she *was* receiving divine help. When we serve other people, when we gather the weeping and the parched, aren’t we doing the work of God? Isn’t God doing *divine work* through *us*?

Isn't God calling us to hoist up these people to a safe place where their sorrow can turn to joy?

There were many dramatic "saves" documented after the tsunamis impacted 12 countries last Sunday. One was in the water off SE India when a rescue worker was lowered by helicopter down into the water to save a boy who was floating on a piece of wood. The Indian Navy helicopter lifted – hoisted – the two of them up to safety, clinging to each other and a strong cable.

Now most children lifted to such a height in the arms of a stranger would be screaming with horror, but this boy was too exhausted to scream. All he knew is that someone cared enough to come for him and **he was going to live**.

My friends, let me tell you the bottom line of the Christmas story:

Someone has come for *us* and we are going to live.

If you ever reach a point in life when you are so exhausted and so hungry and so ready for someone to save you, you know that – at that point – there is no kicking and screaming. You are just so glad somebody has come.

Yes, someone has come, but according to John's Gospel, he has always been in existence since the beginning of time.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.*

He was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being through him,

and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Four major religions were hit by the horrors of last Sunday's earthquake and tidal waves. I believe this could be crucial in bringing the religions of the world together to work for good. All four of those faiths consider Jesus to be a special person. Only one faith calls him Savior. But that Savior came to rescue everyone.

For God so loved ***the world*** – even the parts of the world that do not know him.¹

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On this first Sunday of a new year, it's tragic and yet strangely appropriate that we would find ourselves gathered together in a cosmic, universal state of mourning – mourning the losses of thousands upon thousands of our fellow human beings. It's in

¹ John 3:16

times like these – when we see that life is fragile and can be ripped away in a matter of seconds – that we realize what’s really important. **It’s in death when we appreciate life.**

Thomas Lynch is a gifted poet who, by day, works as a funeral director. Actually he prefers the term “undertaker.” He is a fine writer who has captured in words some of the truth about life and death and faith. He wrote these words:

Better than baptisms or marriages, funerals press the noses of the faithful against the windows of their faith. Death is the moment when the chips are down. That moment of truth when the truth that we die makes relevant the claims of our prophets and apostles. Faith is not required to sing in the choir, for bake sales or building drives; to usher or deacon or elder or priest. Faith is for the time of our dying and the time of the dying of the ones we love.²

Last week and today and for many days to come – in Sri Lanka and Indonesia and India and Thailand – men and women, young and old are going through the rituals of death. Or at least the lucky ones are.

They have identified bodies and made plans together. They have called distant friends and family. They have arranged for cremations and burials. Called the priest. Ordered the flowers. Considered graveside words – who should say what? They have prayed their prayers. Selected music. Searched for the right lyrics. Discovered the perfect poetry. These are the rituals that come with death.

We act out things we cannot put in words.³

Thomas Lynch offers these thoughts as well: He reminds us that, as a species, we’ve been going through these rituals for millennia. We spend these days . . .

. . . looking up while digging down, trying to make some sense of all of it, disposing of our dead with sufficient pause to say they’d lived in ways different from rocks and rhododendrons and even orangutans and that those lives were worth mentioning and remembering.

The truth is that life includes both the boring and the hoisting. There are times when we must dig into the earth whether to bury our dead or simply to investigate what’s down there. Life is incomplete without it.

But life is also incomplete without also looking up. Life is not about serving ourselves. This new year is not given to us merely in order to acquire bigger and better things for myself or improving myself or lifting up myself. Life is about hoisting somebody else, lifting up another soul. Filling the hands of those who reach out in need.

² *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade* by Thomas Lynch. Penguin Books: New York, 1997. page 80.

³ *Ibid.* Page 24.

The meaning of life is to share the amazing news with those who are suffering, those who are waiting, those who are weeping and parched – to remind them that **somebody has come for them and they are going to live**. Even if they die, they will live.

Maybe – just maybe – God will send *us* so that *we* might lift them up in the likeness of Christ.

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A final word about beginnings and endings. It is perfect to celebrate a baptism today because baptism marks – at least ritually – the beginning of someone’s journey of faith. In this case, that someone is a baby boy named Robert. He came into this world just a few months ago and we pray he will thrive in this world for a long, long time. But today, we remind ourselves that his life – and *our* lives – belong to God. That while we hope only for an easy life filled with good things, that nobody’s life is without a measure of frustration and sorrow.

In this baptism, we remember that:

We are making a commitment to lift up this child and point him to the One who has come to save him so that he might live.

And it is our hope that Robert might – as a disciple of Christ – one day point others in that direction as well, that he might spend his life lifting up others, hoisting them out of their troubles to a place of rescue and hope.

This is Robert’s purpose and this is our purpose, but the choice is ours. Will we spend most of our year boring into the ground? Or will we spend most of our time hoisting? Will we dig in and bury ourselves? Or will we be lifted up and lift others with us?

What does the future hold? We don’t know. But in faith, we believe that God holds the future.

Let us pray:

Holy and Wise God, you have sent someone to save us – Jesus Christ. And you send us to work on Christ’s behalf to save others in small and great ways. Fill us with such a faith and such a desire to do your will, in the name of Immanuel – God with us. Amen.