

# THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

I have a framed picture of a sonogram of my twin grandsons. It was taken on the day three years ago this month when we learned that there would be two babies. Our joy at that moment couldn't have anticipated the journey that was ahead—early labor, 10 weeks of bed rest and the struggles of being born seven weeks early. They were truly birthed through prayer.

A lot of life is like that: the vision of what we desire and often the scary, painful, and transforming path that gets us there. As Scott Peck says in the opening words of his best seller *The Road less Travelled*, "life is difficult." One of my favorite posters shows a rag doll caught in a wringer washer—head and feet hanging at either end and middle firmly squished. "The truth will set you free," the tag line says, "but first it will make you miserable." There's a lot of work to be done along the way to freedom.

The story of Lazarus in Luke's Gospel reminds us that there is dying to the old, a time of questioning and unknowing, and then work to be done for the new life to flourish. At first Jesus seems unconcerned about his friend. He's informed that Lazarus is dying and he takes his good natured time in getting there. Martha chides him: "If you had been here..." he'd still be alive. The tomb was going to stink, she told him, because her brother had been dead for three days. Yet Jesus entered and commanded "Lazarus, come out." The poor guy was dead. How was he supposed to come out? Yet out he came, but he still needed help from others to untie him and free him from his bonds.

We're nearing the middle of Lent and the cold winter ground is melting. First shoots of flowers are beginning to make their way through the hard

earth which will soon bud forth a resurrected savior.

Where are we on our Lenten journey? Are our feet and head still hanging out from the wringer washer no farther than when we began on Ash Wednesday? If we've been faithful to our Lenten plans we might have made our way through but our spirits are still a bit flattened. We need help to be revived. We're somewhat like the dried children's toys that take form when soaked in water. We need to be totally permeated with the "water" of grace and mercy to come back to life.

God's love and mercy are always available to us but, like Lazarus, we need to come out of our tombs of guilt and shame and allow the bright light of God's love wash over us and others to help us become free. It is a time of vulnerability and powerlessness, a time of letting go of old ways and opening ourselves to new possibilities, it is a dying and death is painful. "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies..." becomes very real for us.

This year of mercy offers us a wonderful opportunity to say "Yes" and drink in the healing "water" of God's love and slowly, bit by bit, sometimes one step forward and two steps back let our flattened spirits revive. And like the buds of spring with the hard work done mostly unseen in the dark underground earth of our spirits, we arise to new life with our risen Savior and go forth from our empty inner tombs to glorify him with our lives.

-Angela Anno, Pastoral Assoc.

