

Unswaddle him and let him go free

In a brief play called "Calvary" by William Butler Yeats, Lazarus appears amid the crowd watching Jesus carry his cross up that hill. The people press forward *To shout their mockery: 'Work a miracle,' / Cries one, 'and save your self'; another cries, / 'Call on your father now before your bones / Have been picked bare by the great desert birds' . . .*

Jesus notices Lazarus in the crowd and says, *Seeing that you died, / Lay in your tomb four days and were raised up, / You will not mock me.* But Lazarus does indeed harbor resentment toward Jesus : *For four whole days / I had been dead and I was lying still / In an old comfortable mountain cavern / When you came climbing there with a great crowd / And dragged me to the light.* Christ responds, *I called your name: . . . I gave you life.* But Lazarus feels no gratitude: . . . *'Come out!' you called; / You dragged me to the light as boys drag out / A rabbit when they have dug its hole away; / And now with all the shouting at your heels / You travel towards the death I am denied.*

Lazarus did not want to be raised from the dead. Life was too much for him. He longed for a place to hide. But, with his insistence that we live, that we cross every threshold we encounter, that we grieve and grow, Jesus flooded with light that deathly solitude, that corner where Lazarus thought he might lie safe for ever.

This is indeed what Jesus came to do. He came to contradict our inclination to withdraw from people, from pain and effort, from our potential for mistakes - to avoid any revelations which might shatter our complacency. And so he shouts again and again, "Lazarus, William, Mary, Margaret - come forth! Do not resist gestation, do not abort your own becoming." For it is this reluctance to BE that would drag our universe back into the darkness out of which God called it in *Genesis*. It is this reluctance to BE, to grow, to go through the never ending agony of blossoming, that generates so much of the negativity we read about everyday - that generates even the hope of the pious fundamentalist that doomsday may be imminent and of hopeless pessimists that our untidy world come to an end so that we might be simply static for all eternity (which is another way of wishing to be dead).

Jesus would reverse such depression and the meanness it often generates. He summons us to life, hope, humor, compassion, love, solidarity - things that make a cynic's skin crawl. Like the Lazarus of Yeats' play we may - in our moodier moments - resist his summons. We may hope the stone behind which we would forever hide will stay put, block all resonance of his call to come out and grow.

But to no avail. The womb, our self-appointed tomb, cannot be our final resting place. His wake up call will ultimately be too commanding, too challenging to resist and we shall stagger (reluctantly perhaps) out of our timidity before life (with all its variables) to hear his next even more frightening yet seductive command: "Untie him, unbind her; let them go free - to become the saints, the poets, the perennial beauties the Source of all being intends them to be."

Geoff Wood