

My computer crashed the other day. It was a virus I picked up somewhere. I could swear I smelled something when it went down. Something like burned electrical wires: smoky and sulphurous and overheated. Or maybe it was me! I have a short fuse sometimes. I can't believe I fell for it! It was a pop-up that looked exactly like a Microsoft Windows Virus Alert that told me to run a virus "kill" program immediately. I fell for it, red alert and all. Click! Then.....nothing!

Shame on me! What was I thinking? What was that moment when I panicked and clicked? Senior moment? Fear of technology? Or am I just that dumb? There a sucker born every minute, right? Oh, was I mad.

So there was this smell. Or so I thought. I realize now it was my imagination, my own internal wires burning. I have this sense, you see, that different emotions have different "smells" attached to them. Am I crazy? Is it just me? *Fear* smells like opening an athletic locker at the end of a long season – the smell of old sweat and brooding bacteria. What does *Hope* smell like? *Hope* smells like baking bread – rising fresh and warm. *Anger* smells like steam radiators when they first get turned on in the fall – compressed, hot metal burning through a layer of dust. *Hopelessness* smells like.....do you know what hopelessness smells like? Once I had a nice car, a Mercury, sort of an uptick for me. I went away for a week one autumn and when I returned a mouse family had taken up residence behind the dashboard somewhere. So it's a chilly morning. I turn the engine on, flick the heater over, turn up the fan and.....oh, my God. I had not idea such a small creature could create such a stench! I drove the car right to a nearby garage where the mechanic explained to me my choices: I could pay him \$500 to take the dashboard off or I could wait until next summer and sell the car when the heater fan wasn't needed and get out of town fast. *Hopelessness* smells like.....well, you get the idea.

And what does *love* smell like? Mmmm. Love has many smells, I think: fresh laundry, or the ocean on a hot summer morning, or garden herbs when you run your hand through them, or fresh cut lumber, or fall leaves underfoot. I'm sure you could add to my smell list!

My point today is that smell plays a huge part in John's story this morning. Folks warn Jesus not to roll that stone away from Lazarus' tomb. *He's been there a few days, Jesus, he's not going to smell good! Don't go there! Leave things as they are! What a stench! Don't do it!*

But there is no smell! Jesus commands bystanders to *Take away the stone!* And what happens? Everybody sniffs the air! The stench: *it's not there!* It's all in people's imaginations! It was all in their expectations!

So what *did* they smell? The disciples smelled their own *fear* of following Jesus into dangerous territory! After all, here's a bounty on Jesus' head. Mary and Martha smell their own *resentment* that Jesus did not rush to be by their side when their beloved brother Lazarus became ill. After all, they had a special claim on Jesus – he was almost family! The wailers and mourners smell their own *contempt* at Jesus who can make a blind stranger see but can't even help a dying friend. Isn't it amazing what people expect? They're wrinkling their noses and putting up handkerchiefs before the stone is even rolled away!

But there is no smell! The cave doesn't stink! What folks don't realize is that they are wrinkling their own noses at their own disbelief. They have a hard time really believing what God can do! And what does disbelief smell like? Pewh!

There's a *huge* invitation in John's story to those of us who call ourselves believers. Remember that there are no atheists in this story. No agnostics. No outsiders. No seekers. No unchurched. No strangers. These are all disciples and family and friends and followers of Jesus. They are all insiders – church family. They observe the holidays, bring their children up in Sunday School, make their pledges, recite the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm, give to worthy causes, hope to be buried from the church with a few kind words. Sound familiar?

So today Jesus invites them to something deeper. Today he is going to make the invitation graphic and real. Today he is going to invite them to move beyond their own fear and disappointment. You see, what happens when we do not have a personal experience of this life-summoning God is that we start to feel like victims. It's right in John's story! The disciples feel like victims of the bounty-hunting Roman state – Jesus, why would you take us *there*? The mourners feel like victims of the human condition – Jesus, why can't you fix death for us? Mary and Martha feel like victims of their own church – Jesus, we keep the church going, can't you cut us a little personal slack?

Can you hear their disappointment?

Jesus invites them instead to hear and see that they do not need to be disappointed! They are not victims! He gathers them in front of Lazarus' grave, has the stone rolled away and says to all the folks who are holding hankies over their noses: *Go ahead! Sniff the air! Take a good snootful! What do you smell?*

Here's the thing. We all come to worship to experience what Jesus calls *the glory of God*. I understand that we all want to be safe, comforted, healed and encouraged here. But the gospel invites so much more! Do you realize that the glory of God – is you! That Jesus came to give you his life! One of the ancient church fathers said it best: *The glory of God is a human being fully alive*.

What does *fully alive* look like?

- When people tell you not “to go there” – as the disciples told Jesus – but you do anyway
- When -- like Jesus -- you don't try to meet the expectations of others, but you stop and listen for the voice of God for you
- When – following Jesus -- you trust that God can bring life out of the scariest places you can imagine
- When you can roll away the stone of fear
- When you can thank God for the glory in you!

When Jesus says, *I am the resurrection and the life*, he means to share that glory with you. He's not trying to keep the glory of God to himself. He's not moving on and looking back at us, going *Nah, nah, nah, nah, nah* – *you blew it, look what you're missing*.

No! He wants you to *smell good*. To smell the goodness of God where others can only smell their own fear and disappointment.

When I first walked in the door of South Church on a warm spring day in 1989, I remember noticing as I came through the door that the church smelled clean and cared for and well-preserved – but also *musty*. Not the mustiness of dust, but the mustiness of a museum or a gallery where things are hung to be looked at and admired. So much has changed. A few weeks ago, early on a Sunday morning, I came in that same door. The Parish Hall was dark and quiet. It had been a busy weekend with events Friday night and Loaves and Fishes here on Saturday. I noticed the faint smell of coffee and hot dogs and – yes – human sweat. Instantly I could feel life and energy all around me, and it smelled *good*.

What a difference! Thank you, God!

Why come to church to worship on a Sunday morning, unless you really, really want to smell good!