

Unbind him and let him go!

John 11:32-44

All Saints' Day, November 1, 2009

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Unbind him, and let him go!

In today's gospel reading, we see Mary and Martha facing probably their worst loss ever in the death of their brother Lazarus. Mary says to Jesus, "Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died." When Jesus sees Mary and the Jews that were with her weeping, he is greatly moved, troubled in spirit (maybe even angry) and Jesus, too, begins to weep. And then he begins to act in a seemingly impossible situation. One by one Jesus removes the impediments to his final action: He calls for the removal of the stone that is blocking the cave where Lazarus' body lies; while Martha has pointed out the stench of the decaying body that will be present after four days, Jesus still calls out "Lazarus! Come out!" And the dead man comes out, with his hands and feet bound in strips of cloth (I surely don't know how he could walk with his feet bound but I won't try to tackle that puzzle today!). Jesus then says, "Unbind him and let him go." The stone, the stench, the decay, the strips of cloth, the death of Lazarus itself –none of these impediments get in the way of Jesus' purpose here. And when Mary, Martha and Lazarus follow Jesus they will find themselves entering into a much bigger world than they could have imagined. The faith that has drawn them to him, leads them on to a life of freedom, full of twists and turns they could not foresee; it leads them into participating in Jesus' mission. As they put their trust in him, he shows them infinitely more than they can ask or imagine.

The resurrection of Lazarus points to a great truth- that to follow Jesus is to accept life, life of an eternal nature; for this gospel writer eternal life is here and now-there is no need to wait until we die to enter into it. Jesus is always calling us out of the tomb and inviting us into the life of faith that we might face death, knowing we are in God's care at all times, that we might live life more fully without fear and with perfect freedom. Revealed in this story of Lazarus is the life-giving activity of God. God is at work in the world about us, making all things new, helping us move from darkness and death to light and life if we can hear his voice, if we can see him with the eyes of faith, if we can allow him to unbind us from the things that restrict our growth.

I heard this story a couple of weeks ago: there was a man named William who was about to become a monk. Back in the Middle Ages, people often carried around with them nosegays, a little bundle of flowers or herbs that they could put in their pocket and pull out to smell when their immediate environment wasn't smelling so wonderful! It had become a tradition that during the service when men became monks they were given a spiritual nosegay, usually a line of scripture that would become theirs to focus on as they entered into the life of the religious. So when it came time in the ceremony for the abbot to give the spiritual nosegay to the soon to be monk, he said "Be ye perfect." Well that made people laugh nervously for obvious reasons as it is quite a tall order, and then the abbot said, "Be ye perfect, perfectly William!"

So how can you be "perfectly Eleanor" or "perfectly Richard?" and live into the individual God has called you to be? What is binding you and restricting your growth? It might be fear, fear of

death or fear of failing; we might be bound by social norms, our need for control, by addiction, bound by anything that keeps us from growing closer to God, anything that restricts us from the freedom God intends for us. And how as a *church* can we be “perfectly Trinity?” that body of people called to make God’s love known in the world? Perhaps there is some ministry not yet activated that is just waiting to sprout to life if the funding were there to back it up or if the people were there to carry it out. Perhaps there is an ongoing ministry that awaits expansion if new resources of your time, talent, money or other resources were available. What is it that binds us here at Trinity that keeps us from living out our full call as a church? Jean Vanier says that “Mission is revealing to others their fundamental beauty, value and importance in the universe, their capacity to love, to grow and to do beautiful things and to meet God. Mission is transmitting to people a new inner freedom and hope; it is unlocking the doors of their being so that new energies can flow...to reveal to them that they are loved just as they are by God.”

One of the ways we support our mission at Trinity Church is through our pledges. Today we bring our pledge cards to the altar for the coming year’s budget; as Paul reminded us last week our budget is truly a means of our co-creating with God in his marvelous work in the world. God is up to something, always at work in this world around us. By our expressing our faith through contributing our time, talent or money to the mission of the church, we find ourselves, like Mary, Martha and Lazarus, connecting with the work God is already doing and entering into something much larger than ourselves. And it is exciting.

The raising of Lazarus is an invitation for us to come out of the tomb and to enter the fullness of life that is made possible by the risen Christ himself, the Jesus that is with us here and now. There IS darkness in the world around us; there IS death. But just as we saw Lazarus move from the death and darkness in his cave out into the light and life toward Jesus, we are reminded that God has power over death, that death and darkness are not the final word, and that we as saints have reason to hope and to live fully into our mission as a result of that light and life available to us.

Ending prayer: *Loving Lord, help us to see the things in our lives that bind us, both as individuals and as a church, that keep us from living out the life you have offered us. Help us to see in ourselves and in others the fundamental beauty, value and importance that YOU see in us, that we might be agents of your love. Help us to be nothing more and nothing less than the people you have created us to be, perfectly ourselves. Unbind us, Lord!*