

John 11.1-45

Imagine yourself in the story:

I wonder, do you feel like God's beloved at the moment? Or not? Does God seem near, or far away?

They come to Jesus and say, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill', Jesus' beloved friend is ill! This is family we are talking about, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, dear friends. He heard, yet stayed away two days!

Why doesn't Jesus drop everything he is doing and rush over to see Lazarus?

Jesus heard the news that Lazarus was ill, and he waited two days to respond. It was a long time. I suggest it was not because he did not love Lazarus. It was because his strength did not need to respond according to urgent schedules and anxiety. All strength, all health, is beyond our notions of time.¹

He tried to tell them why. It was not because he didn't care for Lazarus. It was much bigger than that. He must have been very sure, or quite conflicted, I don't know. He tried to explain, but they didn't get it.. In the end "Lazarus is dead!", he said. Said it like it was, the truth.

Then he travelled to Lazarus' place.

When, the time to move does arrive, Jesus does move. Yet once Jesus decides to return to Judea, his so-called disciples find plenty of reasons to stop him. Watch out for friends, family and co-workers, who are always finding reasons to stop.

There are always reasons against fulfilling the vision.

Some will say, "Don't go. Don't go there."

Are we always supposed to take the path of least resistance? No, Jesus will walk straight back through the area where they once tried to stone him. He will return.

He had serious conversations with the sisters, his dear friends and often hosts, Mary and Martha, who reacted in their own unique ways.

Yet Mary repeats the same words as her sister Martha did. For all their sharp differences, Mary and Martha are actually quite similar. They love Jesus, but they believe that Jesus really came to fulfil their own, personal, and immediate desires.

"If only God had been here, I would not have gone through all this pain." That is what we most of us say at one time or another, and we are wrong.

Jesus did not come to take away our pain. Jesus came to go through pain himself. Jesus came so that all of us could live through pain to resurrection.

Blaming, hoping, silent weeping.

Then, Jesus wept too. Jesus wept. It is such a human thing to do, not at all God like, it seems, or is it? He got angry and He wept. He got it, other people's grief, and his own. Jesus wept. He did not stand at a distance impassive, he became involved in the event. He wept.

When he told them to roll away the stone, Martha said, "Lord, there will be a stink! ".

Sometimes, in order to have a resurrection, matters are foul and messy. Resurrections do

¹<https://www.stphilipscathedral.org/Sermons/the-raising-of-lazarus-unbind-him-and-let-him-go-an-expository-sermon/> Samuel G Chandler

not happen when all is sterile and clean and smelling like our favourite room deodoriser. Where things stink, is exactly where new life can occur!

"Lazarus come out." he said. "Lazarus come out." Words which mean something else these days..

I remember acting in this story at a beach mission on the south coast of New South Wales. The Lazarus figure was wrapped in toilet paper hiding behind walls of sheets when Jesus said "Lazarus, come out", nothing happened. He said it again, and again nothing happened. Someone went to investigate and found Lazarus had fallen asleep in the heat of a January summer afternoon!

In the story, Lazarus, the loved one, stumbled out bound up in his grave clothes.. I wonder how it was for him?

Again Jesus spoke, "unbind him and let him go." There are no words or even emotions from Lazarus. He is silent.

Have you ever physically been unbound, maybe after having your arm in plaster or your leg bandaged? It feels so free, light. Now Lazarus who was dead, is alive... and the trouble begins for Jesus.

"Unbind him, and let him go!" These words may be even more powerful than the words "Come out!" because now, the community needs to assist in the resurrection. "Unbind him, and let him go." Some of us are yearning to live resurrection lives. There are some here who have been born again; they have risen from the dead!

But, they are still tangled up in burial clothes. They still have the sheets and coverings of death all over them. They are still bound up in something, bound up in old bondages, old arguments, old ways of being.

You know what that's like. You know you are living a new life, but you seem somehow to still be tied to the old life.

Here is where we need community. We need others. Often, it is the task of Christian community, to complete the action of Resurrection. Jesus has called forth new life: Lazarus come out!" But he still has burial clothes on.

"Unbind him, and let him go." Those should be the words which echo for us every day, every new day. Unbind somebody. Where you find someone in bondage: your friend, your partner, your colleague, even the stranger. Where you find someone struggling to be free, unbind them and let them go. Set them free. Do not keep them tangled up in the old affairs of sin and death. Those clothes constrict and make us ill.

When we refuse to let someone go, when we refuse to forgive, when we refuse to see new life, it is we who are keeping them dead. The community has that power.

Jesus, therefore, proclaims to us, to all of us: "Unbind him, and let him go." Those are really the powerful words of today's gospel. Don't hold on to the past. Do not hold on to old behaviour. Do not hold on to death!

Let someone go today. In you mind release someone! And maybe that person is you!

'45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.'

Yes, if we really want the world to know God, we must show forth the resurrection life of Jesus, the new life of Jesus.

Can we come out of our tombs?

Can we unbind someone and let them go?

Can we allow ourselves to be unbound?

If so, the work of Jesus will indeed be revealed, and the world may believe. Our task is to reveal the Holy in the every day, and unbinding, freeing ourselves and others is the way to go!²

Susanna

Lazarus Blessing

The secret
of this blessing
is that it is written
on the back
of what binds you.
To read
this blessing,
you must take hold
of the end
of what
confines you,
must begin to tug
at the edge
of what wraps
you round.
It may take long
and long
for its length
to fall away,
for the words
of this blessing
to unwind
in folds
about your feet.
By then
you will no longer
need them.
By then this blessing
will have pressed itself
into your waking flesh,
will have passed
into your bones,
will have traveled
every vein

² <https://www.stphilipscathedral.org/Sermons/the-raising-of-lazarus-unbind-him-and-let-him-go-an-expository-sermon/>

until it comes to rest
inside the chambers
of your heart
that beats to
the rhythm
of benediction
and the cadence
of release.

Jan Richardson <http://paintedprayerbook>