

Pastor Colleen's All Saints Day Sermon of November 1, 2009

Grace, Peace and Mercy be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

What binds you?
What keeps you bound up?
What is it that you can't let go of?

Maybe you are feeling tied up in knots because of a broken relationship
Maybe your pride or ego is keeping you from seeing another's point of view
Maybe it's your need to control,
The need to be number one
Perhaps you cannot let go of your fears...

Well in this morning's Gospel we hear Jesus saying come out of your tombs,
let go of what binds you
and walk into the light of a new day.
All because of the love of God
All because our faith in God unbinds us and sets us free.

And when we are truly free...
Well then the sky's the limit
because when we are truly free we are not living under our own rules
we are instead living in God's rules.

Which is to say...
We are trusting more
We are loving more
And we are giving more.

Today is the beginning of our Stewardship campaign and the theme for today is giving as an act of worship...
But we're not talking about giving in terms of the money you place in the offering plate
We're talking about giving your very self
Giving all you are to God
Turning it all over so that God can use you in ways you never imagined...

But in order to give all you are to God you have to first let go of whatever is keeping you bound
Because when we are all bound up,
When we are holding on to things that don't matter,
Well how in the world are we ever going to be able to let go and let God?
How can we give all we are to God if we are closed up in our tombs,
Clinging to those things we think matter?

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Clinging to all of our fears and misconceptions....

For example, Mary and Martha had confessed their belief that if Jesus had just been present at Lazarus' sickbed he would not have died,
both sisters had now resigned themselves to their brother's death.
They had given themselves over to grief.

As a matter of fact, they were bound to their grief and had given up all hope.
They were prepared for separation from their beloved brother.
They were prepared for the finality of death.

They were not prepared for what Jesus was bringing to them.
They were not prepared for a miracle.
They were not prepared for hope.
They were not prepared for resurrection.
They were not prepared for new life.

What they were prepared for was their belief that death had won
They were clinging to their grief.
They had confessed earlier that they had believed that if Jesus had just been there in time he could have prevented Lazarus from dying.
And because they were bound to **that** sequence of events
They had no preparation or room for the possibility that God's ways don't always look like ours.

What they didn't realize is how
The miracles of Christ undermine,
unnerve,
and unravel the powers of doubt,
despair, and death that once defined who we are.

They were not fully prepared for the power of the presence of Christ
And quite frankly neither are we.
As long as we are bound to our human ideas and ways,
As long as we are clinging to our own fears and control
Then how can we ever be fully prepared for the power of the presence of Christ when it breaks into our lives.

When we live our lives bound to our fears, our despair, our hopelessness
Then we forget about the power of God in our lives.
We forget that the divine presence of Christ in our lives unbinds us and sets us free.

Free to be who we are
Free to see with new eyes what we have
And free to see what matters most.
And ultimately what matters most is what matters to God.

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In this gospel text we see that Jesus is doing what mattered most to God.
When Jesus stood at Lazarus' tomb the first thing he did was weep...
He cried for his friend who was dead
He could not ignore the sorrow and grief of his friend's Mary and Martha...
He was moved to tears...

And what a great reminder on this All Saints Sunday
What a great reminder that on this day especially God grieves with us all
as we remember our loved ones who have died...
God has shown us through Jesus' tears that God is with us in our sorrow and grief...

And then the very next thing Jesus does is pray...
He thanks God that God is right there...
Listening...
Holding him....
Holding them all....

And then Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead....
Showing all who were present how
Death has no power over God
And death has no power over us...

But how do we help one another to remember this?
How do we help one another live into this reality?

Well, I think we follow Jesus' example...
We weep with one another when there is loss
We hold one another up through our grief
We support one another in our sorrows...

Then we pray...
We thank God for the unbelievable gift of new life through Christ
We recognize that this gift is for us all
And we recognize we can do nothing less than give back as a sign of our gratitude....

Jesus showed the world that day that he was the loving, compassionate Son of God
He prayed to God that the assembled crowd would believe that it was God who sent him
And he did what mattered most
and that was to show all who had eyes to see what the power of the presence of Christ does to
transform their lives from death to life.

And that is what the presence of Christ in our lives does on a daily basis.
Every day Christ invites us to throw off the things that bind us
Every day Christ invites us to come out of our tombs and walk into the light
Every day Christ invites us from death into new life....

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But oh how we resist...

Oh how we insist on making our plans and following them even when God is shouting at us to give up our control and let God be in charge.

Oh how we cling to our needs and wants because if we gave our lives over to God's needs and wants...

Well then what might God ask of us?

Oh how we continue to let our fears bind us up all because we are sure that even though the tomb is dank and musty...

Well it's our dank and musty tomb and perhaps if we just decorate it a little we can continue to be comfortable there.

Folks, today Jesus is standing right here in our midst and he is crying out for us to let the things that bind us fall free

He is inviting us today to come to the table and take the gift of his body and blood into our bodies so that we can taste the new life he offers us

I've always wondered what Lazarus' life was like after this story?

Lazarus was given the greatest gift of all.... new life

I wonder how he lived it?

I wonder if he lived as if there were nothing to lose?

I wonder if he recognized that because God has power over life and death that he had nothing to fear?

I wonder if he gave God his whole life.... all that he was... all that he had... all because he had been shown first hand how the love of God could transform death into life?

This same, exact gift that was so freely given to Lazarus is given to each of us every day.

I wonder if we could remember this how it would change how we live?

I wonder what it takes for us to really understand that the Creator of the Universe...

The one who had us in mind from the very beginning

Is standing among us,

Weeping with us when we grieve,

Wiping away our tears and healing us

Inviting us to trust him with our lives and our very selves.

I wonder if we could leave behind all that binds us... right here today...

And walk out of our tombs...

How would we live our lives from this moment on?

What amazing things would God have in store for us?

May we this day hear Jesus' cry to walk out of our tombs,

May we live each and every day as a gift

And may we be so transformed by the presence of Christ in our lives that miracles abound.

Amen

May the peace of God which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen

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