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Unbound to New Life

Steve Hoffard¹

John 11:38-44

Today, we come to the last of John's seven signs, each pointing to some revelation about Jesus. In our study so far we have heard words of recognition, invitation, abundance, hope, declarations of love and freedom from shame. We discovered that Christ offers all these things without condition.

So today as we hear of the seventh sign, and with it this time Christ's offer of resurrected life, we also need to ask, What could possibly prevent someone from the abundant life that God intends for them?

In the story of the raising of Lazarus Jesus, "greatly disturbed" (the story goes) comes to the tomb and asks that the stone that is sealing it be taken away. Martha looks at Jesus and says, "But Lord, it has been four days already and there is a stench." Jesus doesn't answer her. Instead he turns to God in prayer. Then in a loud voice calling him by name, he commands, "Lazarus! Come Out."

You can picture it in your mind: Lazarus wrapped in the burial clothes, preceded by a sickening foul smell, as stiff and stumbling he comes out of the tomb. He is called by name by Jesus and offered another chance at abundant life. But he is not exactly glowing with it! Jesus has raised Lazarus but the work is not done. It is at this point that Jesus turns to the crowd and says, "Unbind him, and let him go."

The only thing preventing people from abundant life and grace upon grace is us. We need to unbind people and allow them to be who God intended them to be. We need to look beyond what smells foul to us and free people to experience the love, grace and freedom of God.

We have trouble with that. It should not go unnoticed that raising Lazarus to life is the event that begins the process that ends with Jesus being nailed to the cross. There are so many examples of how we keep people bound, so many, too many.

But this is a story of God's life-giving power. This proclamation of resurrection and eternal life is not a future promise but a present reality. The eternal life that Christ makes available is not reserved for an after death future but is made available in the heaven and hell that the human soul experiences in the present. An abundance of life now, that Christ inaugurates.

These signs and wonders are written so that you might come to believe and have life! Abundant life in his name! Christ offers the gift of life and then turns to all of us and issues a command. Unbind him and let him go.

Now that Lazarus has been given life and come out we hear and are called to act on Jesus' command: the command to step forward; the command to enter the stench no matter

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how uncomfortable that makes us; the command to more than just welcome people into our midst, and most importantly the command to do everything that we possibly can to “unbind him and set him free.”

My sisters and brothers and siblings in Christ, you are a holy people, a royal priesthood, called by God to be partners in God’s mission to love and bless the world that God loves unconditionally. You are a people called to carry out God’s mission in the world. At times that mission may seem overwhelming, and at times that mission will even stink to high heaven, and at times that mission will certainly be messy. But that mission is clear, mandated by Christ himself.

Unbind him and let him go!

I pray that it continue to be so among all of you.

Amen.