

In the Name of the Living God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." Unbind Lazarus, who has been dead for four days, but now...by another sign of Jesus... is alive. "

"Unbind him, and let him go." Lazarus had no more need for his funeral wrappings.

"Unbind him, and let him go." Live life once more.

The gospel..and the very foundation of our faith...tells us....tells us unscientifically, of course...that Jesus was not bound by the laws of physics and reason in which we pride ourselves in this day and age. Jesus was not bound by our expectations and our understandings. Jesus was not bound by even our greatest enemy — death itself.

In our own time, after the resurrection of Jesus, we easily forget this good news because we are bound to so much ourselves. We are wrapped in shrouds of doubt and entombed in narrowed visions of what God can do with us today.

Every Sunday, before we celebrate....do you catch the significance of that word, "celebrate" as being central to what we do here?. Before we celebrate, we confess our sin against God and one another. We confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbor as ourselves... There is a Lutheran prayer that puts it a bit differently: "We confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves."

Bondage. Wrapped in the death shrouds of separation from God. The definition of sin.

The act of public confession every Sunday is not common to every Christian denominational worship service, but I'm afraid we would just be deceiving ourselves if we did not say who we are every time we meet together for worship. The point is clear: we cannot save ourselves. We cannot wrestle out of sin's death grip ourselves. So, we confess that we have fallen short of God's best hopes, that we have separated ourselves from God, that we need forgiveness, that we must be unbound by someone greater than ourselves. The liturgist declares every Sunday following the confession that in Christ, we are a new creation. Set free. We have been raised to live once more. Unbound and let go. It is that reminder, every Sunday, that can keep us going. Unbound to respond to God's grace.

Today is All Saints' Sunday, the day we consider the saints of the past, women and men who now from their labors rest. It is common to think of the "Saints" with a capital "S," ...that there is US and then there is THEM. The super holy. Or at least, those who were cozy with the writers of church history or had better public relations than the rest of the more common, smaller "S" saints. But the truth is that we are all saints, each of us baptized into Christ's death and resurrection no more or less part of God's good purposes.

This day gives us an opportunity to give thanks for all those who have gone before us, with our Prayers of the People including the reading the names of those saints close to our hearts. But this day offers another opportunity as well. On this day we consider death and its power over us. When we especially take time to name death as the enemy, an enemy already vanquished by Christ.

We are not too comfortable with death these days in America. Tom Long wrote an editorial in the New York Times that speaks to the fact that many American funerals have become so commercialized and sentimentalized, that they have lost their voice and worshipers have been robbed of their opportunity to proclaim the gospel. Long says today most people attend funerals more to memorialize the memory of the deceased than to proclaim the gospel in word, song, story, and action. Instead, he argues for the Christian funeral as a sacred ritual that connects the gospel narrative to the narrative of the deceased. The funeral becomes a kind of "seeing place," and sacred time in which we proclaim the good news that death is vanquished.

The gospel at the time of death is nothing less than the proclamation that the deceased, our beloved and God's beloved, is welcomed into God's presence because Jesus has already prepared the way. Yet, many times it is hard, when we are caught up in grief, to proclaim the gospel...and that is only natural. After all, Mary and the disciples had the same trouble. They are concerned in today's reading that Jesus get to Lazarus quickly, before he dies so that Jesus can heal him. But once Lazarus has died, they figure, "What's the point?" Jesus can't do a thing now. The crowd said, "Look, he could open the eyes of a blind man but couldn't even keep his friend from dying." Martha tells him not to go near the tomb, after four days dead it already smelled. But then he said in a loud voice, "Lazarus come out!" And the dead man came out. "Unbind him, and let him go." Death is no more. "Unbind him, and let him go."

I have been thinking a lot about vision lately: vision for this church, vision for my ministry here, vision for our future together. The vision of this passage from John, most definitely, is one of hopefulness in God.

The vision of Jesus, who raises even the dead, the very dead...the four days dead...that Jesus who can “unbind him, and let him go” can unbind us too.

So what do we need unbound? Is it forgiveness for that thing we have said to someone? Is it forgiving ourselves for not being who we want to be? Do we need to be unbound from a family or work environment that entombs us rather than frees us to live out the gospel. What do you need to be unbound from? I believe the greatest bindings which we need release from is “control”.

The problem about being unbound by Jesus is that life in Christ is so unpredictable. After all, God...not we...chooses the direction. If we are truly unbound...and we let go of our need to control everything that creates anxiety and weakness and illness among us...there is no telling what the saints of this place might get up to.

So, dare we ask God to unbind us and let us go? Are we ready for what might be raised? Putting our trust in God, we pray that God

Unbind our prejudices and let us go with a new view of others.

Unbind our tiredness and let us go refreshed.

Unbind our thinking that our best days are behind and let us go into a new vitality.

Unbind our hearts where love stops short and let us go to love every single neighbor near far.

Unbind our resources and let those who have much share their bounty.

Unbind our spirits and let us go rejoicing in the life that God has blessed us with.

Unbind us, and let us go....in the communion of all the saints who smile upon us, and take communion with us, and hold us up...together in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.