

*Jesus gives orders at Bethany: Remove the Stone;  
Come out Lazarus, and Unbind him"*

Sermon notes by the Rev. Arnold Bush, All Saints Sunday Propers, 11.4.12, Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, Tallassee, AL 36078

Texts: Revelation 21:1-6a; John 11:32-44, the Raising of Lazarus (in Greek "God Helps") in Bethany ("House of Affliction"), only 2miles from Jerusalem.

I Introduction:

Examine what Jesus did and what commands he gave at the grave of Lazarus. First he weeps and then he gives the order to remove the stone. He looks up to heaven as he prays and then he commands Lazarus. Pew Bible p.1636

II Jesus Weeps

Mary uses the "if only" phrase. "If only you had been here my brother would not have died." We have all used the "if only" phrase. If only I had been driving slower, we would not have crashed. If only the cancer had been diagnosed in an early stage, the person might not be dying. If only the child had not run across the drive way, she might not have been hurt. The translations: The verb *COGAI TGS* in verse 33 means deeply disturbed in spirit and deeply moved It is a display of anger in Mark 21:43, a stern warning; in Mark 9:30, a strong warning not to tell anyone. The early fathers translated the word "anger" later to "groan," "sigh," "chafe."

Two other times Jesus weeps: When coming down the mountain to the Mount of Olives, "He weeps over Jerusalem with its fraud, graft, and crime." On the wide path is the Chapel of Tears. In the book of Hebrews 5:6, he weeps tears of blood at the Garden of Gethsemane.

Application: When we weep:

1. Let us be careful not to MINIMIZE our grieving. As a pastor I hear this phrase... "I need to be strong for my children, my family, when Dad or Mom died." Or "I do not want to look like a wimp or a weakling in public by crying."
2. Often when I am meeting with the family about to bury their loved one, I say something like this. "I know the pain is hard, the loss is overwhelming, but be sensitive about accepting any sedatives or medication that will dull the sharp pain, a heavy chest, or a stomach ache. Do not minimize your grief. The Holy Spirit is with you in this grief."
3. It is okay to let the tears flow. As you see a dear friend or as you sing a hymn, offer a prayer. Emotions will surface that will begin to fill up you tear ducts. Remember our Lord Jesus cried at the grave of Lazarus. God placed those tear ducts in your eyes.
4. I recall a member of the choir mentioning to me someone was crying next to her in the worship. I shared some tissue to help her stop crying. As leaders of worship, let us give people permission to cry before, during, and after a funeral as well as in the midst of worship.
5. Tissue in the pew? What does it mean to you? Reminder to not cry in public? Or a reminder to give you permission to cry in corporate worship.

III The first command of Jesus... v. 39 "Take away the stone  
But there will be bad smell"

Here is a group of relatives and friends of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus standing around, and Jesus steps up with a voice of command. You see the big stone in the opening to the cave. Some of you go over there and move the stone. In this setting here is a command to act and there is a response of obedience.

Here we are celebrating All Saints Day. We say he or she is a saintly person because they obey Christ. I recall teaching a parenting course where the topic of how is the best way to get the child to obey the parent or grandparent. One typical way is to increase the volume of the command. Billy, would you go pick up all your dirty clothes and place them in the wash room? In one of my son's family the order for a chore comes from the mouth of the parent. Set the table, clean the dishes, rake the yard, etc. Then the parent starts counting. 1,2,3, 4, ... 9, 9 ½, 10. Then the child obeys, and the task is completed. One of the signs of a healthy family is the way members are willing to take responsibility for doing chores around the house. This past summer Zoe and I had three of our pre-teen grandchildren living with us a week. I recall the first day or so, Zoe and I were becoming very frustrated with none of the three willing to assist with meal preparation or cleaning after the meal. On the second day I got out a poster and wrote down all the chores that needed to be done: meals and relatively organized bedrooms and living room. I called it a "teaching moment." We are a family where Jesus Christ is part of our life together, and in Christian families we help each other. We share tasks, and we ask each other for help. Jesus asks us to do things for others.

Last week we all answered the questions in the Baptismal Vows within the Baptismal Liturgy. On page 303 we said, "I promise to follow and obey Jesus as your Lord." Note the words FOLLOW AND OBEY.

Application to Jesus' command:

This same Jesus who was at the grave site of Lazarus, said, "I want a group of you to step over there and move the stone away from the entrance of the cave." A few weeks ago, at St. Stephen's, Joe Link, the Birmingham Hospitality Network, said "During the week of November we have three families we will be feeding and who will be sleeping in the Educational Building. Arnold would you be a night host for some 12 persons?" I said, "You can count on me Wednesday night." The youngest is 9 years old and oldest is 17. These are families who have jobs and the children are in public school but for some reason, they do not have an apartment or home to live in. BHN has 3-5 families who sleep and eat in a church parish hall Sun through Sun.

If we know Jesus as our Lord, our boss, or our supervisor, then he is asking or giving a command for us to complete things such as the following:

Talk to me every day in prayer.

Come every Sunday to the meal I am providing in the Holy Eucharist. I want to nourish your soul.

Give a tithe, 10 % of you financial income to my work through the Church.

What is Jesus asking you to do Monday afternoon or Monday night? I'm going to vote Tuesday; Wednesday I'll spend the night on the couch at the Education Building. Another day I'll take out my next door neighbor's garbage.

IV Jesus shouted, "Come out, Lazarus"

Let's say this together: 3 X "Come out, Lazarus"

In verse 43, "He cried with a loud voice; he called in a loud voice; shouted *KRANZAZEIN*." Why did he use a loud voice? Was he in the back of the cave? Are dead people hard of hearing? The word *Kranzazein* is used 9 times in the New Testament, and 6 times in the Gospel of John. On Palm Sunday, the crowds shouted, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." We recall on Good Friday, the crowds in Jerusalem shouted to have Jesus crucified. They shouted "crucify him, crucify him," to bring death to Jesus. But here we have Jesus shouting to Lazarus to bring LIFE to him.

Application to the loud voice:

What is the good news here? It is more than one man is raised from the dead. That is great. But what has been swimming in my head all week is this, "Jesus is using a soft voice but also a loud voice, 'Bill, Laura, Kathy, Arnold, Nancy, come be my friend.' Come be baptized, come to communion." This is an INVITING VOICE that asks, "COME SIT WITH ME ON THE PARK BENCH.

HE IS CALLING US TO BE WITH HIM. IF WE ARE WITH HIM, THEN WE ARE MORE ALIVE. In my retirement I have been able to meet and mix with folks who are active in churches, Kiwanis Club, tennis players, and friends of my adult children. Generally speaking, those who have heard Jesus calling them into a relationship with him have more VITALITY.

In the state of Alabama on a given Saturday, if you name all the college football teams from Alabama A & M in Huntsville, UA in Tuscaloosa, 4 in Birmingham, Auburn, University of South Alabama all would be shouting, "go Tigers," "Roll Tide," "go Blazers" This is a lot of shouting. But Jesus, in both a loud and a soft voice, is saying, "Come follow me."

He calls you by name; in your first breath every morning, at noon time or lunch break, the night meal, and before you place your head on the pillow. Yes, he is calling us by name. Lord on this All Saints Sunday may we keep our ears open to your VOICE.

Immediately, after speaking to Lazarus, Jesus turns to the crowd and relatives around him saying,

"Unbind him and let him go."

John's description implies Lazarus had burial cloths wrapped around him. John's Gospel description of the Resurrection tells when Peter went into the tomb, strips of linen were lying in the tomb. Here, Jesus says to the friends and relatives, "*UNBIND HIM*," (other translations: "loose him"). Verse 44, "*The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth (linen), and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him and let him go." (or "take off the grave cloths and let him go")*).

As followers of Christ we are in the business of UNBINDING OTHERS. How many persons do you know or have known who are RESTRICTED, LACKING IN FREEDOM, BOUND UP IN FEAR OR HAVE AN UNFORGIVING HEART?

There are lots of things that keep us BOUND UP.

1. An unforgiving heart. In doing pastoral counseling, sometimes the person has come for counseling for a poor marriage, a conflict in the work setting or with relatives, or is simply depressed. One question in a counseling relationship is, "Where have you been hurt?" The answer to this question surfaces a lot of bitterness, anger, and unforgiving grudges. At the end of the session, we go the altar rail, where I ask the person to name the hurt aloud and then verbalize that with God's help he or she is forgiving that relative, parent, or friend. Sometimes, the person needs to make a moral inventory

(4<sup>th</sup> step in a 12 Step Recovery Program) asking him or her to go to someone they have hurt asking for forgiveness. I'll assure you this is an unbinding experience.

2. Some of us are bound by fear: We refuse to try something new because we fear failure. We fear looking like a fool or we fear speaking to someone we do not know. Some fear visiting with someone with a chronic debilitating disease in a Critical Care section or Nursing home. This fear in their hearts is binding them so they cannot express care and concern to the patient. Last Friday morning Zoe and I drove via Chattanooga to meet one of our 84 year old classmates. His disease makes it very hard for him to walk from the car to a restaurant, so we met at the TN Welcome Station. I got into the car to communicate our 50<sup>th</sup> reunion event at Sewanee. What am I going to say? How do I say it? I will be reminded that I could also have this disability. This thinking causes some to fear making the visit.
3. Some of us are bound by our assumed sophistication or a sort of upper class mentality. This behavior is a binding that does not allow us to laugh, sing in public, dance, say praise the Lord, or raise our hands. Sister Schubert of Sister Schubert's Dinner Rolls is not bound by assumed sophistication. She is a member of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Andalusia, and I got to know her as interim of St. Mary's. She is one of the richest persons in Alabama, yet she smiles, passes the peace to everyone, and she could clap in church or whistle while she creates recipes in her kitchen at home. At one time I was a low profile charismatic Christian who did not raise my hands high. Jesus gives us freedom to express ourselves. EG Dancing at Sewanee.

Conclusion:

Jesus' promise is to raise us up on the last day.

As devoted followers of Christ, we need to hear his command to do this or help with this. Move the Stone away.

We need to keep our hearing open to hear him calling us by name. Come be in a healthy relationship with Him.

There are folks all around us who are bound up with unforgiving hearts and fears that paralyze them. Let us reach out to unbind our friends and neighbors. But also, let others unbind us so we can reach out to others.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus that for raising us up in this side of the grave, and we thank you for knowing that you will raise us up on the other side of the grave.