

Unbind Us and Let Us Go
Preacher: Rev. Lauren Lorincz
Date: April 2, 2017

12:58

"Unbind Us and Let Us Go" Pilgrim Church UCC Homily Outline, Fifth Sunday in Lent (John 11:1-45) April 2, 2017

Some Background on the Gospel of John[1]

-Structure: the Book of Signs (Chapters 1-12) and the Book of Glory (Chapters 13-21)

-Book of Signs focuses on Jesus' Public Ministry and takes place over 3 years

-Book of Glory focuses on Jesus' last day with his disciples, the crucifixion, and the resurrection appearances (spans only 3 days!)

-There's Seven Signs in John's Gospel: Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana, healing the official's son, healing of a man who had been ill for 38 years, feeding the five thousand, walking on water, healing the man born blind (last Sunday's text), and raising Lazarus from the dead (today's text)

-John specifies that they're signs not miracles. The pattern: Jesus performs a sign, a dialogue of sorts, and a discourse where Jesus explains/interprets the sign for his audience.

-Signs point to something beyond themselves. Not just about their own merit. "It is not the sign alone but the direction it takes you that provides meaning." Think of road signs!

-Our story of the Raising of Lazarus in John Chapter 11 is Jesus' last and greatest act of public ministry, the last public sign performed by Jesus in John's Gospel.

-Raising Lazarus from the dead causes Jesus to get a death sentence.

But is it True?

-Whether this story happened exactly as written or not, it's still true.

-Raising of Lazarus shows us that Jesus had friends and emotions. Like Jesus, we grieve when our loved ones die. Jesus weeps because he's sad.

-Our lives are richer when we have friends—but it hurts when they get sick or even die. We wonder what could have been done to save them (Mary and Martha's questions.) We show up when people we love are hurting (people are present, consoling these grieving sisters in Bethany.)

-Or think of the aftermath and the religious leaders deciding that Jesus must die: we fear what we don't understand. People persecute those who are different from them.

How does Jesus unbind us and let us go today?[2]

-In Bethany one can find the Church of St. Lazarus and the Tomb of Lazarus, where we commemorate Jesus demonstrating the power of God over death itself.

-Early in his time as a Jesuit, James Martin kept thinking about the person he wanted to become and a retreat director told him to focus on the story of the Raising of Lazarus.

-JM was afraid to let things go—“a need to be liked, a propensity to focus on the negative, a desire to control things.” So he began to contemplate what unhealthy patterns in himself needed to die and be left in the tomb. He advises us to connect to Lazarus’ story by asking ourselves what part of me needs to die?

-“For another person, what needs to die may be entirely different—an attitude of pride, a constant desire to be right, an inability to forgive, an overly cynical attitude toward life, a hatred of a particular person, anything that keeps that person from a full life.”

-Jesus speaks to us just as powerfully as he spoke to Lazarus in John’s Gospel—Jesus’ last sign, his final and greatest act of public ministry were accompanied by the words: “unbind him, and let him go.” (John 11:44)

-Those words are an invitation to all of us to be freed from old patterns and unhealthy behaviors that prevent us from being the people we want to be, the people God created us to be.

-This is a timeless story of hope, of God’s power over death and Jesus’ invitation to new life.

[1] Karoline M. Lewis, John, Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentary, 6-8.

[2] James Martin, SJ, Jesus: A Pilgrimage, 312-330.