

“Free to Go”

Sunday, October 23, 2016



“Unbind him and let him go.”
John 11:44b

Lazarus’s sister Mary, the one who later ends up anointing him at dinner, sends a courier to Jesus with the message, *“Lord, the man you love is ill.”*

Upon receiving it, Jesus responds, enigmatically,

“This sickness will not end in death, but is for God’s glory, that through it the Son of God may be glorified.”

To add insult to injury, after hearing it he waits two whole days before calling on his disciples,

“Alright, now let’s go back to Judaea.”

Upon which, they cautioned him that it hadn't been so long since the Jews tried to stone him there... saying,

“Rabbi, why would you go back there again?”

Jesus replies, *“I’m bringing the light of day to those stumbling around in the darkness,”*

our first clue as to what it is toward which the author of John’s Gospel is leading us.

He wants to shed light on something.

After telling his disciples that Lazarus is at rest, a sleep from which Jesus will be awakening him, they heave a sigh of relief... *“He’ll be safe then.”*

But Jesus wants to make it perfectly clear,

“No! He’s dead! Reeeally dead!”

And so... off they go...

Martha meets them on the way... and falls at Jesus’ feet,

“Lord, if you’d been here he wouldn’t have died.”

When he arrives, Mary says the same thing, the words with which today’s reading began,

“Lord... if only you’d been here,”

OMG so easily slips from the lips of many who otherwise deny the existence of God.

But the God we confess as being present in Jesus is here! Here, in you... in me... in all that has life.

“I have come that you might have life, abundant life... abundant life for all.”

“Resurrection is not an ‘End Time’ event, but a here & now event, Jesus tells Martha.

Then with all the mourners, some of them mumbling,

“He healed so many others... why not this man?”

Jesus - weeping - follows them to the tomb and prays,

***“Abba,” he addresses God... “Father, daddy,”
I thank you for hearing my prayer; I know
in my heart you are always attentive to me;
but... I speak for the sake of everyone here
that they may trust it was you who sent me.”***

And now comes the introduction to the climax.

“Jesus cried out in a loud voice,” John tells us.

“Lazarus, come out, let them see you.”

**And out he stumbles, tripping over the
grave dressings wound round his body.**

**All those present, holding their noses in
anticipation of the smell of rotting flesh,
cringing at the sight... they hide behind
the sleeves of their mourning clothes.**

“Unbind him, let him go,” says Jesus.



Now, finally, we reach the climax of this miraculous story.

Lazarus needs to be set free, released for all to see & hear.

And John's Jesus is the catalyst to set it in motion.

**Lazarus, the Greco-Roman version of the Hebrew Eleazar,
means, “*God has healed.*” God is our helper, our healer.**

**The Church's job is to release that into the world,
to be the life-giving vehicle for transforming lives.**

**Jesus wept because the aristocrats and religious elite,
first cy leaders of the Jewish Temple and Synagogues,
had lost sight of this holy calling from Elohim, Yahweh.**

On a previous visit to Jerusalem, the one of which his disciples spoke when they warned him not to go back, Jesus addresses them and exposes them (John 8:47).

“Whoever claims to come from God listens to the words of God. The reason why you do not listen, is that you are not from God.”

The Lazarus story, John’s exclamation point on Jesus’ words... eventually led to his crucifixion.

What does this all mean for Sydenham St. UC in 2016?
How do we respond to the challenge Jesus throws out?

First... let us have a look at your Constitution.
The 1973 objectives amended in 1989 say this:

“To maintain SSUC as an active local part of the Christian Church, in the pursuit of spiritual and social welfare of individual members of the Congregation and in pursuit of Christianity’s mission in the world.”

If the Christian mission is to pursue at home and spread abroad the abundant life Jesus promised, then I’d say your objectives line up well with that.

Your 2014 Vision Statement goes something like this:

“As an Affirming Congregation, we seek to be a vital faith community within the UCC: engaged in spirituality, justice & creativity, informed by Jesus Christ and the Bible, and discerning the call of the Trinity, celebrating diversity, inclusivity & abundant life.

At the very heart of this Vision Statement you have inserted the name Jesus Christ.

The Mission Statement that comes after expands on how you follow his example.

Reading your JNAC and some of the attachments about the SPIRE campaign and the conversations with other UCC congregations about “joint” efforts, has “inspired me to engage with you” in those areas.

Which leads me to expound on my personal spirituality,
which flows from a deep love for Christ and the Church.

You saw the 3-legged church we created
that is the children & I, a few minutes ago,
different from the 4-square we usually see
in our mind's eye, when we talk of church.

The three legged chair has no spare legs.

Still, moving from 4-square to 3-legged
takes some effort... the piece that dis-
appears is the leg of control, of power.
If you have been watching the UCC in
its 90-yr life, particularly the last 45 yrs
of that life, you will have seen that leg
gradually disappearing.



The UC Moderator is no longer consulted

by the Premiers

or Prime Minister as to what Canadian people are thinking!

And parents telling their children and grand-children
they must be in church on Sunday falls on deaf ears.

*“Give unto God what is God’s
and Caesar what is Caesars,”*

said Jesus when shown the coin
required for the Temple tax... the
brass coin with an image of “The
Caesar” stamped upon its face.



And Caesar seems to be in charge of more and more,
as the church’s control over community life is fading.

But, I think that loss of power and control is a good thing;
because the other three legs is what Church is truly about.

Preoccupation with power and control is deadly.
The other three aspects, however, are life-giving.

The primary leg from my personal perspective is Worship:
the time we spend together, in community, to call on God,
as we open ourselves to communion in the body of Christ.

**Personal devotions, family devotions, that's fine too,
but no substitute for what we are doing this morning.**

**We need to do this, we must do this, together.
This is a major component of abundant living.**

**The 2nd is what I call Church Life, everything else
we do together from the social time after worship,
to committee meetings and small group activities.**

**We nurture one another to energize for the 3rd leg:
which is our "Outreach Life" out into God's world.**

**Tuesday morning I experienced an aspect of the 3rd leg
as I saw your Food Voucher People sitting with people,
not just with a handout but in meaningful conversation.**

**Emails & conversation with Jim & Lynn about the Truth
and Reconciliation report and initiatives with Chalmers
to engage it, is another aspect of that, as is "The Spire."**

**It is my fervent hope that we will engage in all three,
as we climb together, leaning on the Spirit of Christ.**

Isaiah gave us God promises about climbing that mountain: