

*All Saints Sunday-November 7, 2021*

*Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish*

*John 11:32-44*

*“Unbound”* *Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad*

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from his Son, Jesus Christ who was sent into this world to unbind you and to set you free. Amen*

*In 1789, Benjamin Franklin declared what according to his perspective are the two certainties of this world. Death and taxes. You can speak to your accountant and get their advice on what financial maneuvers can be done to ease the pain of your tax bill, but Ben Franklin is probably correct that the sting of paying taxes won't be taken away completely. However, as certain as death is for everyone, on this All Saints Sunday we proclaim that the shroud of death that is cast over all peoples of all nations as Isaiah described in the first reading has been removed completely for you.*

*“Jesus wept”, John 11:35 which is commonly recognized as the shortest verse in the bible is even more commonly misunderstood. Jesus is much more than sad when we consider paying taxes on the same level as death. Jesus is greatly disturbed. Jesus weeps when we become like the sisters of Lazarus and stand by the grave of a loved one weeping and believe Jesus has arrived too late. Jesus weeps when we believe the only reason God sent his only son into this world was to prevent death from arriving at the homes of our family and friends. Jesus weeps when we fail to see the power that Jesus has over our greatest enemy-death. Jesus weeps when our faith in him ends when the body of someone we love is put into a grave. Jesus weeps when we remember Good Friday but forget Easter morning.*

*Some of the people who heard Jesus weeping and saw his tears fall at the grave of Lazarus believed Jesus wept because he saw Mary kneeling and weeping at his feet and they thought Jesus was unable to hold back his tears because he was so deeply moved by her sadness. They said it was out of his love for Lazarus who was no longer just sick in bed, but now stinking in a grave that he wept. Others who saw Jesus' weeping believed he was sad because it seemed that Jesus' power had reached a new limit. They had witnessed Jesus restore the sight of a blind man, but now when it came to preventing the death of a close friend, it seemed they had called the wrong physician.*

*It is true that there are many places cited in scripture where Jesus was a good physician. Jesus restores many people's condition to what it used to be and there is no doubt that his healing hand still touches people today. However, Jesus didn't raise Lazarus from his grave to get people to believe his condition was misdiagnosed. Martha was clear that this was not the case. She knew that Lazarus did not still have a faint pulse that could be shocked back into a strong heartbeat. There was nothing left in Lazarus to help Jesus jumpstart him back to life. She even wanted to prevent Jesus from getting involved. When Jesus said, “Take away the stone”, Martha reminded Jesus that her brother had not*

*just taken his last breath, but even the spices that were wrapped next to his body to reduce the smell of death couldn't hide the reality that Lazarus was dead.*

*Jesus was about to show his father's glory not by an amazing act of resuscitation, but through a firsthand demonstration of a resurrection simply by calling Lazarus from the tomb as if he was in a deep sleep. The only thing that Lazarus gave to Jesus to deliver him to new life was his death. So, with a loud cry, Jesus said, "Lazarus, come out." There was no waiting period for the witnesses to wonder what would happen next. When Jesus called Lazarus to come out, that's exactly what he did. Lazarus didn't even take time to remove the bands of cloths before walking out of the tomb. When Lazarus heard his name, this was not an invitation for him to decide what his next move should be. The only help Jesus asked for was for the people to unbind him and set him free.*

*It seems to me that there is something missing from this resurrection event. I have witnessed some spectacular comebacks in sporting events like when a volleyball team seems destined to lose, but a series of great serves changes the result to a surprising win. Or in a football game, when it appears time has run out and, but a hail Mary pass connects in the end zone again there is an unexpected victory. In each of these cases, the crowd can't help but jump to their feet and cheer on the team players who contributed to the miraculous win. But in this resurrection story the only words from the crowd were when Mary scolded Jesus for arriving too late after Lazarus was already dead and when Martha warned Jesus about the smell that would come from the tomb if they rolled away the stone. But when the dead man Lazarus walked out of the tomb, there was no cheering from the sidelines from the witnesses. Mary and Martha didn't apologize to Jesus for doubting what he could do. Mary didn't fall at the feet of Jesus a second time in tearful gratitude for bringing Lazarus back to life. There was as much silence when Lazarus was unbound and set free as when the disciples saw the tomb of Jesus was empty.*

*The power of Jesus to raise people from the dead threatened the authority of others. In fact, in this same chapter, some of these authorities said, "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him." They had hoped that putting Jesus to death would prevent others from believing, but after three days, the stone that kept Jesus silent was rolled away. Not for Jesus, but for you.*

*The shroud of death that Isaiah said covered all nations was now replaced with good news being preached to all nations. The day of the Lord is not a day that you and I wait for. The day of the Lord is now. Tears are no more. Faith in the power of the resurrection has replaced our fear of death. Jesus has taken your sins from you to his death on the cross and replaced your guilt with his righteousness. You have been set free by hearing this good news just as Lazarus was set free by hearing Jesus call his name.*

*Jesus didn't have to tell Lazarus what to do next. Jesus simply told the witnesses to unbind him and let him go. You too are let go from this place to share this good news so that others will not fear but believe. Amen*