

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

March 22, 2026



## UNBINDING

*letting go of hangups and living*

by Drew Downs

After Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, he says to the people there a line full of meaning: “unbind him and let him go.” He was physical bound to their rituals of death, so in a very real sense, he needed to be removed from all of that to return to the land of the living. But it is also a deeply metaphorical command. Let go of the things that would keep him bound in your hearts. The things that hold us to the before times and to a life of skeptical frustration.

What happens when we accept this invitation for ourselves and expand the scope a bit? Dare we see the way Jesus is changing the world and our own precious expectations for him? Do we hold him, our loved ones, and ourselves bound to expectations that don’t fit any longer? That haven’t changed with the moment? With the needs of the world? With our own lived experience? Has Jesus brought things to life that we keep wanting to treat as dead and gone? Dare we live, too?

# LENT

2026

## WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

### Big Stories

In Lent, we're reading these long gospels, including the visit with Nicodemus, the woman at the well, Jesus giving sight to the man born blind, and the resurrection of Lazarus. In one sense, these stories defy our expectations of a gospel passage that's about ten to fifteen versus long. This week's is forty-five! And yet what we receive from John is not snippets of moments, but whole stories, textured with detail and intricate themes.

And this year, I'm thinking about these Lenten themes of Jesus's widening the circle, redeeming the lost, and bringing those on the outside of the movement in. If we recall the invitation to a holy Lent from the Ash Wednesday service, this is a big part of our work during this season: to prepare ourselves to widen our circle, to welcome and restore.

This week's gospel is as much about pushing back on the people's expectations of death and dying as it is a command to let go of them. This isn't just about Lazarus in particular. It is about all of the fears and certainties that hold us back. That keep us obsessed with death — our own and our institutions. And Jesus arrives in the midst of our dread and outrage and bitter feelings of loss and how he should've tried harder to save us from this moment to say that this expectations is not based on faith at all. And, to be honest, it smells more of Satan's temptation than of Jesus's faith. No, Jesus comes to resurrect the dead. We are people, not of never dying, but of death and resurrection. This is the key to eternal life: that we learn to embrace death. As it is the only way to live. Again.

With love,  
Drew+

# LENT

2026

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## FOR SUNDAY

*Lent 5A*

March 22, 2026

### **Collect**

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

*from John 11:1-45*

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

# LENT

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## Reflection

In one sense, this is the story of Jesus the healer, making his way to the site of yet another miracle. In another, it is about friends wanting to save a life. And in a third sense, it is about expectations of the Messiah. How we wrestle with all of these together speaks to our own expectations – of Jesus, of Scripture, and of what we are supposed to do with ourselves.

What may be the most understated character of this story is just how focused Jesus is on his mission here. And how much that conflicts with others' expectations.

The people around Jesus are obsessed with preserving Lazarus's life. They see Jesus's job as needing to save it at all costs. We might say this is entirely consistent with a pro-life stance. But two things in the story stymie this expectation:

1. Jesus isn't compelled to save him – he plans to raise him.

2. The timeline itself shows that saving him is impossible (he's been dead for days). In this way, it is both Jesus's intention and the circumstances themselves that render these expectations for Jesus moot and kinda scandalous, actually. They want to take it out on Jesus for not stopping time or teleporting or what have you.

It isn't just that people had strange expectations for Jesus, but that they also lacked sufficient vision to see a much simpler idea: that Jesus could bring Lazarus back from the dead. That this was a more reasonable assumption than stopping time.

Jesus, for his part, refers to Lazarus's death as "sleeping" and that he is going to wake him up. And then, when he does, he invites the people to restore his form to the living. To take him out of the death clothes and bring him back in. That is their job here. To welcome him. To shed the expectations that don't fit to free him and let him go.

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