

In the Scripture which we are about to read, a certain man, named Lazarus has been ill. Lazarus is the brother of Mary and Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair. She devoted her life to following Jesus and did all the right things. The two sisters did what they thought they were supposed to do as followers of Jesus.

Their brother was ill and so they sent a message to Jesus to come and heal their brother. Jesus had already healed the blind and the lame and they no doubt believed that he would heal their brother. They had total faith in him. But Jesus does something quite strange. He receives word of their request and chooses not to come to their brother's aid at first. In fact, he stays two days longer in the place of relative seclusion where he was.

How selfish of him. Jesus gets word that someone is ill and he decides to spend a couple of extra days unwinding. After his two days of "me time," Jesus departs with his disciples to Judea. The disciples are concerned by this journey into Judea because they fear that Jesus will be stoned to death. But Jesus tells them that they must go. That Lazarus is dead. And so they embark on this new journey.

When Jesus arrives he discovers that Lazarus has already been in the tomb for four days. Four days is significant because Jews believed that the soul left the body after 3 days. So Lazarus is believed to be completely gone. It is here at the body of Lazarus that Jesus encounters two very angry women. They are Martha and Mary, sisters of Lazarus. Martha confronts Jesus and scolds him for not being there. Mary has the same response. Let us pick up the story in verse 32.

"Unbind him. And let him go." Words spoken by Jesus to the people who surrounded Lazarus who had just come from the tomb. The tomb of death. The tomb that Lazarus was laid in because Jesus was not there to heal Lazarus when he was sick. Jesus offers no excuse for his tardiness to come to Lazarus' side. He instead offers his tears. He stands beside Mary and Martha and offers his tears of grief. After sitting with them in grief, he responds to the situation by demanding of those around Lazarus to unbind him, and let him go.

There are many of us who are feeling trapped by one thing or another. We may be trapped by our addictions, we may be trapped by emotional trauma, we may be trapped by our financial situation, we may be trapped by decisions we made which have made our current life difficult, we may be trapped by old ways of doing things that no longer work anymore and we don't know what to do. We come into this service overwhelmed and trapped.

What do you do when you have been told that if you do all the right things that life will be good and you have done all of the things you thought you were supposed to do but something happens and your life tumbles into chaos? What do you do when you set up a long range strategic plan for your life and something happens and all of the variables change? Feeling bound up is a very common feeling among a lot of folks. Because Jesus was not there when he was sick, Lazarus dies and he is all bound and trapped in a tomb.

When we feel trapped and bound, the first thing that many of us do is think that if we just work harder at our old ways we will work ourself out of the tomb. But, actually, falling back into old ways of thinking can actually end up getting us bound even tighter.

One story from our history as a continent which is quite revealing of how old ways of thinking can bind us up is the story of Sir John Franklin and his search to find a route through the Northwest Passage. In the 1800s, the Europeans wanted to find a trade route across the northern tip of Canada that their ships could travel around North America in order to get to the lucrative markets in Asia. The Southern route around South America was very dangerous.

The well known and highly respected ship captain Sir John Franklin set sail with a ship that was well stocked. It contained food, clothing, tobacco, liquor, and many luxuries that many of the sailors had never encountered before. The ship contained mahogany writing desks, large amounts of school supplies for the men to learn while at sea, there was even an organ for entertainment and a camera for pictures. The ship contained all of the luxuries that the old world had to offer. It

was equipped to be a safe place to navigate the kind of world that the men lived in. It would have been a great ship to navigate the known waters in Europe. But there was just one problem. This ship was not heading out into the known world. This ship was heading out into the unknown world. And in the unknown world, the strategies of the old world don't always work.

There was also something else that this ship possessed that Sir John Franklin was very excited about. There was a new technology which had just been invented which would allow them to survive for long periods of time. This new technology was a huge breakthrough. This new technology was the tin can. This tin can would allow them to store food that would not spoil. And what was the product in these tin cans that allowed this new technology to work? This food was packed in tin cans made of lead.

Well the voyage of Sir John Franklin never made it through the Northwest Passage. Their bodies were found and when they were examined it was discovered that the bodies contained large amounts of lead. The theory is that the sailors died from lead and food poisoning.

Sir John Franklin, the famous captain from London who set sail with all the best technology and luxuries found out that what works in the Old World doesn't always work in the new, unknown world. In the changing environment where we live folks need to develop new strategies.

Folks, we live during times when many of the old rules are changing around us. Some of us recognize it, some of us do not. Some of us are trying hard to go back to the places of comfort where we knew what to expect but are frustrated because we are quite confused with events around us. We are working harder at living lives that seemed to work in the past. But we are getting worn out because we feel very bound up and feeling more and more strangled.

In researching about Franklin's attempt to navigate the Northwest Passage, I came across a different story. This is the story of John Rae. Unlike Franklin who depended upon Old World luxury and technology, Rae went to live in Canada as a surgeon. He lived among the native people and discovered their ways. He walked over 1200 miles during a two year period and learned from the native peoples how to live off the land. John Rae was able to discover the final part of the Northwest Passage and he did it by learning to adapt and listen to the people who were already living there. He learned new ways of living in the new world.

Unbind him, and let him go. This new world that we are moving into can be a scary place. And the temptation is to hold onto old patterns. To hold on to old formulas. But new worlds can also be exciting places to live. It means we get to experiment, we get to try new things, we get to explore and discover. We get to fail and we get to create things that have never been created.

On this All Saints Day I think we need to celebrate the people like John Rae. People who were willing to learn, adapt, and explore. People willing to try and people willing to fail.

Unbind him, and let him go. I hope we can be people who follow the example of Christ and keep moving forward. May we work to develop new skills, learn from new people, and seek to discover what God is up to in the New World that lies ahead. AMEN.

-Info on Franklin from Hall, Amanda, "The Franklin Expedition: What Really Happened?" and found at www.mystoriesofcanada.com

-Info on Rae from Wikipedia

-Text: John 11

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