

**Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Holy Eucharist – Trinity Sunday  
The Rev. Phillip A. Jackson Transcript**

**“The Promise of Letting Go”**

“We can be unbound in him. We can be free.” Preaching at our All Saints' Day Holy Eucharist, the Rev. Phillip Jackson invites us to recognize the restrictive weight we carry with us –be it vanity, ambition, delusion, fear, or something we think we need– and let go of it. Father Phil reminds us that Jesus says to us now what he said in today's gospel and what he said on the cross: let them be free. “That promise is just as good today as it was then. And it will always be good. We can always let him unbind us.” The readings are Isaiah 25:6–9, Psalm 24, and John 11:32–44.

**Sermon Transcript:**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Please be seated, everyone.

Good morning. Good morning. Today's gospel that we just heard from John 11 is in some ways the narrative high point of the first half of John's gospel dealing with Jesus's ministry. It's the high point because in it, Jesus performs the 7th of his seven signs. Probably the most powerful, quite frankly, because in it: what just happened? By the way, the economy of language in this belies how much is going on in this passage. But in it, Jesus has gone to the home of his best friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, their brother. He goes to the home because they have called him. The two sisters have called Jesus to come because Lazarus is ill. You may recall that Jesus does what? He stalls before going to Bethany to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, so that by the time he gets there in the passage we have today, Lazarus has not only got worse, Lazarus has died. Lazarus has been dead for how long? Four days. Four days. That's right. He's been dead for four days. The scene is of such incredible power and such incredible depth and emotion. It's compactly told. Mary approaches Jesus when he gets there, she kneels at his feet and she says, "Lord, if you had been here- and you can hear just a little tone of reproach there, can't you- Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus sees her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit.

Jesus was disturbed in spirit because this is his friend. Then we have the line says he was deeply moved. He asked them, "Where have you laid him?" They tell him, "Come and see." On their way there to the tomb, it really could be translated, for power, instead of Jesus began to weep, you could translate that just, Jesus wept. The Lord cries at the thought of his friend being dead. Now, as I have looked at this passage over the years, there's always for me, the one part of it that is the narrative zenith of what's going on here. It's when Jesus is at the tomb and he merely says in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." He does. The dead man comes out. To me that's obviously the crown. That's where it is all pushing to. It's the actual performance of this thing of raising the man from the dead. All week, instead of thinking about that part, all week there's something that haunted me. It's the last line which I never pay attention to. But it's the last line. Read it with me. It says, Jesus said to them the dead man came out, his

hands and feet bound with strips of cloth. That's how they buried people, wrapped him linen strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus says to them, the crowd. He says, "Unbind him and let him go." Unbind him, unwrap him and let him go. It was just a throwaway and okay because I'm always focused on the power in the actual raising him from the dead. All week have been thinking about that other line, unbind him and let him go. Anybody here ever see the Invisible Man? Remember that movie? The Invisible Man. The Invisible Man has to be wrapped. He wraps himself in cloth so that you can see the outline of his body. That's what Lazarus looked like. All week I've been thinking about that and then something came to my mind.

Of course, you know me, it has to be Thomas Merton. Something, one part of a book he wrote called *New Seeds of Contemplation*. In which in this book, he maps out the difference between our true self and our false self. Our true self, the self that God created in each one of us and our false self, which is the self we put out to the world. The self we want the world to see, the self we want to imagine we are. Listen to what he says. Merton writes chapter 5 of *New Seeds*, he says, "Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person. A false self. All sin starts from the assumption that my false self, the self that exists only in my own egocentric desires, is the fundamental reality of life to which everything else in the universe is ordered." I love that line. False self believes that everything else in the universe is ordered around itself. "Thus, I use up my life in the desire for pleasures and the thirst for experiences, for power, honor, knowledge, and love to cloth this false self and construct its nothingness into something objectively real." Now listen to this part that got me all week. "I wind experiences around myself and cover myself with pleasures and glory like bandages in order to make myself perceptible to myself and to the world. As if I were an invisible body that could only become visible when something visible covered its surface." There is a lot. But listen what he's saying. He said this is what we do.

We cover ourselves with experiences and a desire for power and honor. All the stuff that we carry, we wrap around ourselves because we think that will give shape and contour to our self. Does that make sense? That's what the false self does. What hit me this week as I unpacked that, was that when Jesus says to the crowd, "Unbind him and let him go." He's actually saying that on two levels, the first level is just the practical, unbind him and let him go. He's saying that to the crowd. But simultaneously, the Lord is saying the same thing to who? Who's the great enemy? Who's the great thief? Death. He's saying to death, "You're done. Unbind him, unbind them, and let them go." What he's saying is we no longer have to be our false self. We can be unbound in Him, we can be free. Think about all the things that bind you. What binds you? You care about how you look. You care about who your friends are. You care about what kind of work you do. You care about other people look at you. How other people see you. You wrap that around yourself like strips of cloth. Jesus says to that thing, "Unbind her, unbind him. Let them go. Death, you have no more thing here. There's nothing more. There's no room." That's what he's saying. He's talking to death itself and saying, "Unbind them, let them be free." Folks, think about it for a second. Think about your life right now. What's binding you? What's wrapped around you? What do you need to be free of? Because Jesus says to you today exactly what he said to the crowd then, exactly what he said to death then, exactly what he said on the cross. Death, no more power. Unbind them, let them be free. What do you need to unbind? What do you need to be free? The words are good then, they are still good now. He makes the same promise now that he did then. Unbind them, unbind him, unbind her. Let them go. That promise is just as good today as it was then. It will always be good. We can always let Him unbind us and let us go.

Amen.