



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE REV. ADAM CONLEY, CURATE

THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT, MARCH 22, 2026

EZEKIEL 37:1-14; PSALM 130; ROMANS 8:6-11; JOHN 11:1-45

“LAZARUS, COME OUT!”



John tells the story of the raising of Lazarus in such a way that the miracle itself gets very little airtime. Jesus is right quick about it, summoning Lazarus up and out of his

deathbed and into the care of his family and neighbors.

Jesus issues two clear commands in rapid succession. The first is to the deceased, his dear friend: “Lazarus, come out!” he says.

The second is directed to the assembled crowd, Lazarus’ community:

Jesus says, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

We are not meant to dwell on the marvelous in this story as much as we are invited to embrace its meaning.

The raising of Lazarus is a sign, like so much in John’s gospel, and here, toward the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry, it points to the cross and Jesus’ Passion, but also beyond it, to the harrowing of Hell and the ultimate victory of life over death – so potent, so powerful, that it is beyond miracle, let alone human understanding.

It is, however, as solid and true as reality; it is our new reality in Christ.

Life in Christ, where death has lost its sting, on this side of the veil, and also beyond it, forever.

This is our Easter hope, even as we stay present to our Lenten preparation.

I wonder, what if we were to linger with the actual raising of Lazarus – the sign – for a minute? What if we were to take a moment to dwell on the marvelous, on the miraculous elements of this story? What might that look like?

A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of attending the Episcopal Parish Network Conference – (a church-wide meet-up for all things Episcopal) – in Charlotte, North Carolina.*

In the vendor exhibit area, I picked up a “gay Bible comic,” (for lack of a better name). The Diocese of North Carolina produced these with grant funding in the hope that they might be a tool to foster greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ folks, especially in less affirming parishes.

The comics explore well-known Bible stories through a queer lens. This is more creative re-imagining than serious scholarship. But that’s the wonderful thing about scripture – it can hold the truth of our imaginative readings as much as it can the facts of rigorous historical exegesis.

As you might have guessed, there’s a queer telling of the Raising of Lazarus in the comic. With graphics and word bubbles, it lingers entirely within the miracle, the sign, and not in the surrounding narrative and dialogue. It expands two sentences in scripture into an imagined private conversation between Jesus and his friend.

I’d like to invite us into this brief re-voicing – or showing – of the story.

Imagine a dark burial vault, illustrated with gloomy shades of gray and black. Color has abandoned the story. Curled up in a fetal position is a human figure, wrapped up like a mummy in strips of white burial binding cloth.

Jesus has already summoned Lazarus to “Come Out!,” but Lazarus delays.

He prevaricates about how he must stay in there. He’s afraid of the world outside and how it might judge him if he were to come out. He worries that he scares people out there, so this must be where he belongs. He wants to avoid

disappointing or angering anyone. It's easier, safer in there, entombed and alone.

Jesus interrupts Lazarus' protests to say that life can't be lived in a tomb! Lazarus was made for life, and life still awaits him. His people need him.

The world, for a while yet anyway, still needs him. Jesus promises to stand with Lazarus when times get tough.

Again, Jesus says, "Lazarus, come out!"

The mummified figure gets off its deathbed and moves toward the opening with the stone rolled back. Lazarus says, "I will Jesus, with your help."

The shadowy black-and-white storyboard transitions, like Dorothy in Oz, into a riot of rainbow-hued celebration.

Lazarus is out!

Many in the queer community, and that's me, too, will resonate with Lazarus' trepidation and fear as we remember our own coming out journeys. However, I think this telling of the Raising of Lazarus as a coming-out story has something to say to everyone in this room and watching online.

What has you entombed? What deathward spiral is Jesus calling you out of? And more than that, what new life are you being called into? The answer to these coming-out questions, of course, will be unique to each of us.

Recalling how Jesus commanded Lazarus' community to aid in his unbinding, I believe we are also called to discern these coming out questions as a community, as the church.

My fellow Episcopalians, I'm convinced that all of us who strive to abide by the baptismal covenant that shapes our Christian vocation must come out!

The times we live in demand it. We are called to discipleship as individuals,

but we are also called to speak truth to power as Christ's Body, the Church!

If we take our baptismal covenant seriously, and I know Saint Markans do, we know that we have something to say, or maybe better to show, to this dangerous, politically charged moment. The fundamentals of Christian faith offer nothing short of life and hope for a nation and a world that is desperate for these things.

Like any coming out, this is difficult, sometimes scary work. But we have the answer for a deeply wounded, hurting world. This is not to deny the validity of other spiritual paths, it is simply to claim the path we know. It is to live the faith we've been given, boldly, confidently, in word and deed, with God's help.

The gospel is our unbinding. It is good news for everyone. It is life. It is freedom. Freedom *from* fear and hatred. Freedom *for* friendship that flows from Jesus' radical egalitarian respect for the dignity of every human being. And it's freedom for love borne out of the reconciling power of forgiveness.

Easter is coming, but for now, we have our work cut out for us. Keep giving it all away, my friends. That's the miracle, that's the sign, that's the call.

Lazarus, come out!

John 11:1-45 [Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and Deacon The Gospel of the Lord. 8 the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 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." Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.]

*Comic written by Fiona W. Dunn and Members of the Swindell Speakers Committee, including queer and ally clergy and lay people. Illustrated by Fiona W. Dunn. Produced by The Ella and Leicester Swindell Major Speakers Fund of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina. For more information about the project and queer resources, go to <https://www.episdionc.org/?s=marvelously+made>.