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Moved By Love

As Christ's body we unbind each other. We teach each other what it means to be dying and always made alive. We are both Lazarus and the community brave enough to get close, to help him shake off the wrappings of death. We know what it is like to wear grave clothes, and yet we are clothed with Christ.

In seminary I learned about community organizing. Part of organizing is doing one-on-one meetings with other people. In these meetings we have the opportunity to learn what is important to others. What makes them tick. These are not surface level conversations. They engage your guts. Where do our passions and convictions come from? Go deep. Here we learn vulnerability is power.

I remember sitting with my friend Erin at a Starbucks in Hyde Park, early one morning. She was having a one-on-one with me. She was trying to get to know me beyond small talk. What has made me who I am? I knew some of the things that have made me who I am.

Having divorced parents, a dad who is in recovery, being born with cerebral palsy, living as a gay man, having a step dad who got laid off from his union job never to get it back. Sharing all of that felt risky. What would she think? We believe we are better off keeping those things at a distance from others and ourselves. We don't want to overshare and we feel ashamed. We feel bound by pressure/expectations.

Just last week I experienced a small conflict with another person because I was embarrassed about something. I felt like a failure. It was a small thing, but those build up over time. I felt bound. Shame is a powerful thing.

The God of all creation has come close. In the face of grief and death, this God draws near. Led by love, Jesus enters into the depths with Mary and Martha and then goes even further. Keeping nothing at a distance, the Triune God embodies the full breadth of our experiences. All that it means to be human- especially the parts we'd rather keep hidden away from ourselves and others. Keep us bound. Christ is there in the places that we shriek away from within and without. Where shame causes us to hide our face, God looks directly at us with grace. The triune God is greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. The Almighty keeps going. The one who will one day wipe away every tear is the one whose eyes well up with tears and weeps. This is our God whose vulnerability is power.

Jesus doesn't stop there. He goes to the heart of despair- the tomb itself. Lazarus has been dead for four days. But, this one, cheeks red, eyes still puffy, tunick still tear stained, heart still broken, now raises his voice/still shaky and speaks. At this word even death must submit and surrender all held in its grasp. Lazarus lives again.

This God will go further. Christ will so identify with death that he will die. His broken body emptied of life. Abandoned and forsaken. God, not of glory but of the grave. His body was wrapped in clothes so we might be set free. Three days later- he will rise again still bearing his wounds. We say to one another, in the face of our own losses, failures, pain, shame, trapped in our own tombs, and overcome by deaths too numerous, that no death will ever have the final say. Even though we die- we live.

Thursday our community suffered a blow. Someone with such passion, faith, and gifts, taken from us way too soon. Unexpectedly. The whole situation- shocking and horrible. We are angry, disturbed, and so, so sad. Julie, we love you, we wish you were still here.

What do we say now? Just like with Mary and Martha, the God who is still here is the one who weeps with us. God moves close. God holds us. We wait for that day when we join her around the feast that Isaiah spoke about. In that place, death will not even be a distant memory- it will be wiped away like our tears. The old order of things will be buried for good. Until then, we gather with the communion of saints as we taste a foretaste of that heavenly banquet. Christ in your hands and in your body.

Jesus told the community gathered to unbind Lazarus. We experience new life now in moments, still, east of Eden, it sometimes takes others to help us shake off those stubborn grave clothes. To unbind us. That is what I experienced in one-on-ones when I could finally let go and open up. Expectations, pressure, fear, shame, being unbound little by little. It is what Julie helped so many do. When others come close, see us for who we are, call out our gifts, greet our vulnerability and failures with open arms, make space, listen without judgment or cheap answers, we step into resurrection again and again. Like Christ, Julie did that for me. Her witness, like a voice saying: come out and live.

Even in these earthen vessels that betray us, we are alive. If we have been united in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. You have put on Christ, now. You belong to him. Today.

As GK Chesterton wrote:

“The sages have a hundred maps to give That trace their crawling cosmos like a tree, They rattle
reason out through many a sieve That stores the sand and lets the gold go free: And all these
things are less than dust to me Because my name is Lazarus and I live.”