

**Lesson Plans that Work**  
**Year A – Fifth Sunday in Lent**  
**Gospel Lesson for Adults**

**Scripture: John 11:1-45**

Lent invites us to step off our mental treadmills, take a breath, and look around. Lent invites us to ask: Where are we demanding solutions? Where can we risk staying in tension? Where are we blind just not noticing? What do we thirst for? Where are we bound or stuck? What will we risk doing during these 40 days of Lent to clear a space in which Easter can break through?

**A Notation for This Week’s Gospel**

He has been in the tomb for four days, Martha reminds Jesus. Yet Jesus stands before the tomb and cries in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” Then Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” Where are we bound? What is keeping us from getting unbound?

**Theme: Getting Free from What Keeps us Bound**

**Before Class:** You will need copies of the scripture for today. It is a long passage and you can read it all at once or read a section, stop to discuss, and then read another section. If time is a constraint, eliminate the sections in parentheses. You will also need a few copies of The Book of Common Prayer.

**Beginning:** Invite the group to look for the facts of the passage and discuss what the story means. At the same time, be looking for the signs that we, too, are bound up.

**Opening Prayer:** We thank you, God, that you continually call us out of the tombs we have crawled into and call us to new life in you. Amen.

**The Scripture: John 11:1-45** Invite five people to read the following sections. If there is insufficient time to deal with the entire passage, the suggested sections in the event are (those in parentheses could be quickly summarized but not read): Verses 1-6, (verses 7-20), verses 21-27, (verses 28-31) verses 32-45.

**Questions:**

- I wonder why Jesus waited so long to come to Lazarus’ bedside, arriving after Lazarus had been dead 4 days? (Possibilities: Jesus knew he could, if he chose, raise Lazarus from the dead. Jesus was showing that he was not subject to anyone else’s agenda, but on his own timeline.)
- Jesus healed many sick and disabled people but raised from death very few, so why do we think he chose to raise Lazarus? (Among possibilities: two women without a man would have great difficulty in their society and Jesus was very fond of this family. Perhaps Jesus was trying to prepare his followers for his own death to be followed by his resurrection. Perhaps he was trying one more way to get people to notice that they were bound by things and that they could get unbound.)

- What is the disciples' response to Lazarus' illness? To Jesus' choice to wait? To Jesus' decision to return to Judea? (At first they were sure Jesus would want to rush to the side of their friend, Lazarus, and then they probably decided that Jesus had information that Lazarus was not as sick as they thought. When Jesus did decide to go, notice their distress in verse 8.)
- What is the response Martha and Mary have to Jesus' return? (verses 21b and 32b) Can you think of a time your head told you that you could trust something you were confronting, but your heart was not there yet?
- Make available copies of the Book of Common Prayer. Suggest people find page 491 and compare what they see in the opening sentences with verses 25-26 in today's passage.

**Getting Closure:** Ask the group to sit in silence as you offer a few ideas.

Invite them to see themselves bound, tied-up, not free.

Invite them to notice what it is that is constraining them.

Tell them it is not about feeling guilty, just noticing what it is that is holding us back.

Then, imagine Jesus coming to us and telling us to untangle each other, free each other, let each other go.

Now, see yourself free of this strangling binding.

**Closing Prayer:** Thank you, God, that you call us to be free. Help us to see where we are bound so that we can become free. Amen.

## John 11:1-45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup>Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup>So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' <sup>4</sup>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.' <sup>5</sup>Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, <sup>6</sup>after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

<sup>7</sup> Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' <sup>8</sup>The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' <sup>11</sup>After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' <sup>12</sup>The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' <sup>13</sup>Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. <sup>14</sup>Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup>For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' <sup>16</sup>Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

<sup>17</sup> When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. <sup>18</sup>Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, <sup>19</sup>and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. <sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' <sup>23</sup>Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' <sup>24</sup>Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' <sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup>and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' <sup>27</sup>She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

<sup>28</sup> 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.' <sup>29</sup>And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup>Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup>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. <sup>32</sup>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.' <sup>33</sup>When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. <sup>34</sup>He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' <sup>35</sup>Jesus began to weep. <sup>36</sup>So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' <sup>37</sup>But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup>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 for four days.' <sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' <sup>41</sup>So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. <sup>42</sup>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.' <sup>43</sup>When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' <sup>44</sup>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.' <sup>45</sup>Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

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