

FREE HIM, AND LET HIM GO!

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“FREE HIM,
AND LET HIM GO”

By Jim
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When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" He who was dead came out, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Free him, and let him go." John 11:43-44 WEB

You perhaps know John's account of the overwhelming family grief at the death of Mary's brother Lazarus, and of the miracle of miracles as Jesus raised one who had already been dead and entombed for several days.

When I hear this lectionary passage read I think, not of physical death, but of the far worse problem of spiritual death that too often transforms what formerly were fired-up Christians into virtual corpses arranged in neat rows in the pews.

The raising of Lazarus is a metaphor for what can happen when the Holy Spirit arrives to resurrect victims of spiritual death. Earlier in our history we used to call such happenings “revivals.” They were sometimes held outdoors in big tents, surrounded by horses and buggies and later by Model T Fords. Sometimes they were run by charlatans interested in nothing but money, while at other times they evidenced great outpouring of God's Holy Spirit. Think of masses of people experiencing divine conviction for sin and praying the Sinner's Prayer of contrition and repentance as they stumbled down the ”sawdust trail.”

How does spiritual death overtake formerly lively Christians? Several possibilities come to mind.

Faulty doctrine contributes greatly to the problem. Some teachers believe that the Age

of Miracles ended with the first Pentecost, and that charismatic manifestations like divine healings, speaking in tongues, and casting out demons ended two thousand years ago, and have no place in Christian worship today. If that's what you believe you will certainly not be seeking such manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and will likely dismiss them if they occur in others.

Excessive ritualism in worship is another hindrance to Holy Spirit presence and revelation. Its effect is to limit the spiritual experience of worshipers to what others experienced long ago. These ancient experiences may be legitimate and even useful for Christians today, but the effect of excessive dependence upon such behavior in worship often limits worshipers from gaining new insights into familiar scriptures and from being willing to adopt new spiritual practices. If you feel bound in religious tradition and ritual, remember the Apostle Paul's advice to those Corinthians who were also inhibited by their failure to perceive Christ and his liberty in the Old Testament: "But to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. But whenever one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:15-17).

Complacency

is another enemy of spiritual life and growth. No one is beyond need for Holy Spirit leading and spiritual nourishment, and no church is beyond need for Holy Spirit anointing. God's critique of the church at Laodicea found in Revelation chapter three (considered by many to be symbolic of the generic Christian church today) still strikes home today: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of my mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and don't know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked...' (Rev. 3:15-17). This complacent church leaned on its wealth, status, and pride, forgetting that in God's view they were literal basket cases.

Other

inhibitors of spiritual life are wealth and unreasonable attachment to it, the fear of being considered different, and open ignoring or rejection of scriptural invitations to Holy Spirit anointing.

Jesus

ordered the viewers to "Free him, and let him go!" Whatever your hindrance to spiritual freedom in the Holy Spirit, try Jesus' order to Lazarus, and be freed.