

Look for the Liberator

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[0 : 0 0] Psalm 23. Good morning. The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters.

He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. And from John, chapter 9, 1-17 and 35-38, As he went along, he saw a blind man from birth.

His disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? He himself will redeem Israel for all their sins.

[1 : 0 2] But this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, and no one can work.

Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. Go, he told him, wash in the pool of Siloam.

This word means sent. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. Those who had formerly seen him begging asked, Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?

Some claimed that he was. Others said, No, he only looks like him. But he himself insisted, I am the man. Your brother will rise again. How then were your eyes open? They asked.

He replied, The man that called Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.

[2 : 0 3] And whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was the Sabbath. Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight.

After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. Some of the Pharisees said, This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath. But others asked, How can a sinner perform such signs?

So they were divided. Then they turned again to the blind man. What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened. The man replied, He is a prophet. Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, Do you believe in the Son of Man?

Supposing she was going to the tomb of the one there. Tell me, so that I may believe in him. This is the place where Jesus was and saw him. In fact, he is the one speaking with you.

Then the man said, Lord, I believe, and he worshiped him. This is the word of our Lord. When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

[3 : 10] Where have you laid him? He asked. Come and see, Lord, they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, See how he loved him.

Friends, would you pray with me? Almighty and gracious God, we appreciate coming to you in this moment and in this time. We thank you for the gift it is. And now, having come with our hearts open, please plant a seed in each of us, a seed that will grow and bear fruit for the honor and the glory of the entrance.

Take away the stone, he said. But Lord, said Martha, the sister of the dead man, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.

And we're talking about looking for the shepherd. Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God? And you got to hear that famous verse, right? The Lord is my shepherd.

And immediately most folks' brains kicked into memory mode, right? I thank you that you have heard me. Even though we're using a contemporary translation as opposed to the one most of you are probably saying, right? But I said this for the benefit of the people standing there.

[4 : 07] Because most of us grew up reciting the King James, and so that I lack nothing throws me when I hear it, right? But that being said, I'm betting most of you kind of followed along with the place.

And that's a good thing. It's a good thing that we have that kind of familiarity with the Scripture. And that it has that place in our hearts. But it's interesting when we start talking about this idea of looking for the shepherd, because having a shepherd implies something else that usually we don't like, right?

Because implying shepherd means sheep. We usually don't talk about ourselves as sheep. And if we talk about people as sheep, it's usually not done in a complimentary way, right?

When we talk about people being sheep, it usually means that people aren't thinking for themselves. It usually means that they're just happily let alone and aren't very intelligent and that sort of thing.

And somebody starts talking about you as one of the sheep, as I said, most of the time your back gets up a little bit. I heard your word, Lord, move in each of us even further. Touch that space in us.

[5 : 12] That kind of makes it weird when we're so happy to have this shepherd in our lives. Through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The other thing about having this particular Scripture on our mind this morning, is that some folks get a little sad when they hear this.

Because it seems like the 23rd Psalm gets red-light funerals. Every one of your bulletins should have a little blank sheet of paper. They start to, their brain kind of kicks into that moment. Okay?

And if you don't have one in your particular bulletin, use your friendship card for what we're going to do. If you're online, you can give us that enthusiasm that we all need to hear when we're looking at Scripture.

It should bring that out in you, right? You can participate in this as well. Because when you consider what it means to have God love you like this, I want to ask everybody a quick question. It's a big deal, okay? But see, as you heard me say at the opening, shepherds were not really widely respected.

You don't tend to think a lot about shepherding in the 21st century. Like zero being totally cool with not having to worry about them. And the thing about shepherds was in 10 being, I need to be in complete control.

[6 : 21] It was not something you really want your kid to grow up and be, if you want to think of it that way. Okay? I see some folks who are kind of, I see some folks who are in other people. That tells us something. You needed them for temple sacrifices.

People ate the meat. We're going to leave that conversation for another day. People needed shepherds around. That being said, that meant people had to be with people all the time. Most people like control. And it meant they were out in the fields.

Most people like to think that smelling like sheep. Things are kind of going the way I want them to go. And folks usually didn't like having shepherds around at life. They were, as I said, kind of a necessary evil. If you don't think you're a person who likes control, problem though, let me share a little bit with you.

Is that we can't function without them. Now, I have a pretty short list of extreme pet peeves in my life. There was still something about being a shepherd that was considered so valuable.

One that is either at the top or always very close to the top. And it's people who backseat drive. It's that idea that the shepherd works that hard to take care of sheep.

[7 : 22] If you really want me to go to a not churchy place of love to take care of sheep. Then do some backseat driving in my car. But the shepherd goes off and gets the ones that fall into a trap.

The talk about control thing. Because that's what backseat driving is about. Always have enough to eat. So if you are not the one behind the wheel. And things are not exactly going the way you want them to go.

You feel the need to make sure you share this information. And Jesus talked about this shepherd thing a few times. And most of us remember a verse that says something. And that kind of is a manifestation of our need to feel some degree of control.

Because Jesus used this even further. Because as much as I don't like batseat driving. If one wanders off. Wouldn't leave the 99 to go get the one.

Because. And you remember that important point. Exceptionally not challenged to be a batseat driver. Because you sit there and you'll go. Well. I don't know if I'd risk my 99. I don't know if it's a passenger in my own car. Until.

[8 : 24] You're the one that needs to be free. If somebody ever drives my car. And thankfully the person who does it the most. Is the person who happens to love the most. What does it mean to have someone that will come and get you. But that being said.

It really takes pretty much all my self-control. Not to say and do things. When there are predators around. When somebody else is driving my car. Because. What does it mean to have someone that will come and sustain you.

Despite all this stuff I'm talking about. When you can't find what you need by yourself. In that moment. Now I'm talking about this control thing. And we can sit here and have a humorous view.

As your shepherd. Of backseat driving and other things. Where you might decide you're on control. Today we get to look at a story of that in a real way. I really want us to wrestle with. Because we can talk about it as a metaphor. Or we want to. But we get to see it in a real way.

Because this thing like backseat driving. John 9 tells us this story about. Jesus healing a man born blind. Is this idea of. And what I love about this story.

[9 : 20] Is that we kind of get. How do you respond. Right. This is one of those ones where there isn't really a dispute. About the thing that you think. People would be fighting about. Let me take a question. Because there is no real argument.

About whether or not. What happens when something's actually controlling. Or whether or not he was born blind. That's just taken as a fact. Because here we are. In this time. And most folk have known this guy.

So they know that he just didn't roll into town. One day. And start pretending to be blind. So he could beg. The other thing is. They know where his parents are. We find that out later in the story.

Because they go and get them. We'll say more about that later. And how do you handle. But. He's clearly. Blind. Because that can be rough. And when we talk about things controlling you. And so Jesus and the disciples.

There's nothing that controls me. That's an interesting question. But what about something like. Say. One we want to sit with. Especially as we wrestle with the shepherd idea. Where something happens in front of you.

[10 : 15] And all of a sudden you look back. Say maybe ten minutes later. And you realize. All this scorched earth. Was it him. In your wake. Because. Or was it his parents. Something. That he was born blind. Actually. It's an interesting thing.

Because you would think. A baby wouldn't have sinned. So that it would be born blind. What about. Right. The ways in which you might cope with stress. That's the question they pose. The ways folks might run. We still kind of float around.

That kind of. Unhealthy habits. Twisted thinking. Right. That. Something must be bad. Something must be wrong with you. You must have done something to deserve that. Because something happens in front of you. Your.

But Jesus. Levels. Reminds us of the simple truth. Some degree of control. That's not how our God works. You want to make yourself feel better. Because it was neither. His parents were sin. And all of a sudden. Or himself. Something's controlling.

That led to this blindness. But. It's here. Is Jesus' point. It's here. That loss of control. And because it's here. Comes out in life. We have the opportunity.

[11 : 08] We just don't think about that. To show how God can do amazing things. Because if we could control. We can shine the light of God. Into his life. Then. They wouldn't turn into. Because he's carrying his birth. The problems they turn into. And so.

Jesus heals him. But it happens in every single one of our lives. It may look different. From person to person. But it happens to each of us. Because there's a problem. And. As we said today. And Jesus steps into it.

Part of our challenge is. Take care. Well what are we going to do. Of what's going on. With those moments. Notice. Sometimes we get it. In our heads. That well. If Jesus loved me. I'd never have any problems. Things like a medical condition.

And we know that's a lie. That may dictate. What happens to you. We deal with stuff. Or. Something. And that's a much deeper conversation. That I'm going to get into this morning. But the simple reality of it is.

Is that you have a God. Who loves you enough. To step into your moment. With you. But that's what we're talking about. What controls you. And to do something about it. And what's fascinating about this story.

[12 : 04] Is people keep being people. Is as you heard me say. Because the guy gets healed. Is that. When he comes back. Our title today. Is looking for the liberation. As Amy was reading it. Right. The people say. Well wait a minute. On Thursday.

We said. How are you better now. One of the things we got. That's a legit question. Liberate us from. Doesn't happen spontaneously. But at the same time. When we talk about. What we're being liberated from. These things.

I don't even think that's him. Right. I don't even think that's the dude. I think he just looks like him. If we really want to be free. Of these things. If you don't. So the people are subjected to them. Well that's an idea.

But I want you to hear something. Really important. In that part. Ways of being free. Because even though the people. Around them are doubting. Even though the people. Around them are questioning. The man himself.

Holds on to what he knows. To be true. He holds on to his story. Or how we can wrestle with. These things that control. He's like look. I was blind this morning. Now. If you want to follow along.

[12 : 58] We're in John chapter. And now I can see. The story of Lazarus. So if y'all don't get it. That's your problem. Takes up the interaction. That's what happened to me. It's a pretty familiar story. To most of us.

If you've been in church. Do you hold on to your story. That's one of Jesus. Most profound miracles. See because when the shepherd. Has come to you. The way the story opens. When you know. Is a reminder. That you've been fed. When you know.

That you've been cared for. When you know that God has worked. In your life. To that degree. Dead and dead. Do you let the questions. Talk you out of who you know your God. Pretty obvious thing. If you know the story.

Do you let the doubts. Of others. Tell you. That what God has done for you. Isn't true. Goes to great pains. To make sure he says that. But he holds on to his story. And the reason why he says that.

Is because especially at that time. And then of course. The church. If somebody had been. Yeah. Dead for a few days. Because it says what happens now. Is after the people come. And ask all the questions.

[13 : 52] The Pharisees show up. Somebody was dead. Unless. The church gets involved. They had been dead. For more than three days. So. And so that four days. Is not there. What happened here. Because the writer.

Wants us to make sure. Because you know. Sometimes church folks. Was dead. Well that can't be a miracle. Because we didn't say so. And so. Because that's essentially. What the debate is about. We pick up. They're like.

Well wait a minute. In it. This guy came over here. And he'll. You want us to believe. That God did this. As you grapple. Well God can't have done this. Because it happened on a Saturday. And we know that nothing's supposed to happen. On a Saturday. So first.

We come into. The Sabbath debate. Is it not. That's the way after Jesus has left. Where he's been. He gets to Bethany. And Martha. Lazarus' sister. That's what people are doing. And they have.

A really interesting conversation. They're going to go back and forth. So. Starting in verse 21. Whether or not this can be called a miracle. Or whether or not Jesus can be taken seriously. Because he doesn't follow. My brother would not have died.

[14 : 49] But. I know. That's where they are. That even now. But again. God will give you. You see the power of that truth. Whatever you ask. Because the man. Keeps telling the story. Your brother.

Will rise again. I was blind. Martha answered. I know. Man you will rise again. Mud on my eyes. In the resurrection at the last day. And now I can see. Jesus says to her. I.

Am the resurrection. It gets worse. In a life. We skipped that part of the story. The one who believes in me. Because I told you. They went and go get his parents. Even bring him into the church. And then there's more debate. And the one. Who lives by believing in me.

I spared you on that part this morning. Will never die. Do you. Believe us. But. We skipped ahead to the most important part. That's the question you got. Because as we talk about our shepherd. Do you.

Where we picked up the story. In verse 35. Tells us. Jesus heard that they kicked him out. See on a certain level. The answer is easy. That's what happens. They kicked him out. Yes. I believe that. They wouldn't bend.

[15 : 44] But even in the conversation with Martha. You see that Jesus had to bring her a little further. Like we come to this conversation. In a particular place. And Jesus. We love Jesus. We get up. We come to church.

See that's the shepherd thing. We do the things. But this thing that's in our lives. Because when Jesus knows. For Martha. It's the death of her brother. And your life. It's something else. But this thing that's in our lives right now.

People who are supposed to know better. People who are supposed to love. The question we got to wrestle with. But they kicked him out. Do you really believe. That Jesus has the ability. To do something about it. But Jesus is the one who goes and finds it.

Do you. Believe. And when Jesus finds it. Because if. He asks them the question that matters. You do. Do you believe in something.

The challenge then becomes. Can you actually trust him. Now. To do. This guy. Who's probably not a big church person. Because if you don't actually think. You may have heard the stories. And had some of that ground.

[16 : 40] Be handled. But at the same time. He's like. Who is. That says. Quite a bit. That I may worship him. Because. Whatever it is. If you're holding on to it. With both hands.

And you're saying. Well. I got this problem. See. He's the one that's talking. But. My almighty sovereign creator God. And can't help me. He worships him.

Now. When you hear me say it like that. Everybody goes. Who would actually think that way. What does it bring out of you. Problem is. We all actually think that way. This is a theme.

We just don't use that sentence. Because. When things. Did go sideways in your life. Then. When things aren't going. According to the plan. And says. I am the resurrection.

And the life. And then God moves in your circumstances. What is your response to that. Hesitate. We don't get stuck. See. Because. The whole theme underneath.

[17 : 34] What we've been talking about. Over these past years. And Martha. Is when the world gets weird. When the world gets ugly. When stuff gets strange. It's clear that he loves these three. We start looking for ways to feel three.

In a way that he's not close to others. We start looking for things. That we believe will help solve our problems. In other words. She still needed that extra push. We go looking for love. She still needed that extra step. So the journey for all of us is.

Well. Where is it? I got to go now. A shepherd. So that I'm ready. To surrender this thing. To the one. Who is in fact. And when we know. That he has taken care of us.

In the right ways. What then do we do. It may be. When we don't know the answer. That's okay. But we see that happen. Do we just take him for granted? Jesus interacts with. I'm.

Mindful of. For example. He'll be the father of a demon possessed child. When he comes down. Or we just kind of level off for a little bit. And then when things are going fine. Then something new happens. And we wander off again.

[18 : 30] That may be the step. Like. I don't know what I'm missing Lord. I don't know where I'm stuck. But help me get on. And yet we still discount how amazing it is. But that's the question. That when there's 99 sheep over here.

Believe this. Because if we can't start there. Jesus is still. Willing to love you enough. So we go a little further in the story. When you're lost. Mary. The other sister. Has come out.

And she has almost the exact same conversation. She says when we. But what happens when Mary comes. Mary's in the house. And there's people in the house. The deeper question we got to ask ourselves. They come out to meet Jesus.

So now there's this crowd. And they are in mourning mode as well. So they're weeping and wailing. What does this look like? He has shown us who he is. And he shows us what he does.

And yet we still. And we still. Have this thing about ourselves. That sends us. To these other places. Jesus saw her. Meaning Mary. When Jesus saw her. And that's really our lesson today. And the Jews who had come along with her.

[19 : 22] Also weeping. Why can't we trust that love enough. To stay. Where we know things are right. Where have you laid him? Why is it. When he has shown us over and over.

Do we still ask questions. Do we still doubt. Do we still think the grass is literally greener. From the sheep perspective. So over there. All of this sadness. Grief.

This pouring out emotion. Is happening around Jesus. And if you hear nothing else today. I want you to remember. That you are loved like that. You are loved so much.

That not only does he do the right thing by you. Because that is how he moves. And it's powerful enough. That is his disposition. That is who he is and what he does. Now. Many of you in here.

May have experienced a program we offer at the church. Called Grief Share. That he is still willing to leave. I was a participant in Grief Share after my mother died. And I've been a facilitator of it a few times myself. See the thing is.

[20 : 20] We hear. In one of the interviews. When they're talking about connecting your grief. To your faith experience. And like many of you. I grew up in a house that had it. One of the people in the video. As art. Says something. There's this little thing. There's one of the little death mount things.

That my mom kept. Had 20 minutes. And this man shares. How in the midst of his grief. And others of you. I'm sure. Of Jesus. May still have it somewhere. Some of you may know it by heart. And were taught to memorize it.

In Sunday school. And all the good things. Words. But. The question I want you to sit with today. Is what does it mean to you? I want you to sit with.

Not only from a sentimental standpoint. It is hard. But what does it really mean to you? When you think about how your life is lived. When you consider who God is for you.

What does that song. The reason why that should hit. To your walk with God. A little different. I want you. To hear it again. Jesus knows. And I want you to remember. What it says.

[21 : 17] Jesus knows what happens. When it says. The Lord. Jesus knows what's going on with. The simple sentence. I lack nothing. And yet. Shows you.

In this world. A God who provides. When he's surrounded. Now. Some of us. May not have always had enough. It moves him. Some people may have struggled. Mightily. Of tears.

But you hear today. Which means. There was something. Provided. Jesus could respond. In any number of ways. At some point. And even if God. Only provided the opportunity.

For you to do the work. To earn. What was on your plate. You still. Ended up. With what you needed. You lack. Nothing. Who will weep. With me. God. Is your provider.

For those of us. Who are struggling. We got to take that. A lot further too. Those who have frustrations. And those who are like. Man. My world is so crazy. Now. I don't want to get. I wish I just had a break. He makes me. Go a little further. Into this context.

[22 : 12] And what's actually said. He leads me. Beside in the manuscripts. Is that. Jesus is not just crying. Because he's sad. See the thing is. If you're not. Finding peace. In your day to day world.

Jesus is actually going further. Where are you looking for that peace? I bet you're looking. In the wrong place. As opposed to the right place. When he sees all these people. In their grave. Because if you leaned into God. Is that Jesus. And if you trusted his leading.

Is that he is actually broken hearted. For the ways. In which we find ourselves. Where you could find rest. This reality. About how we. To those quiet waters. Are so overcome. Where you could relax in mind. By things like death.

And the ways in which we are trapped. In things by sin. And what it does to us. That. When you're looking for guidance. When you've got decisions to make. Remember the words. When you want to know the right thing to do.

What does the song tell you next. And right trouble. He guides me along the right path. For his name's sake. It's that combination that gives that away. He shows you what is right.

[23 : 08] And what. He moves you in the right direction. What you need to see. Not only for your benefit. But because you are the walking. Talking example. Of the power of who he is.

What you want to open your heart up to. When the world who doesn't follow. Is just how much. Finding the wrong things. Jesus wants to help. The people who around you. Will see in you.

What it means when you follow God. See the thing is. He guides me. We tend to come at Jesus sometimes. On the right path. With these prayers. For his name's sake. Jesus is sitting there. And he's got other things to think about.

Stuff happens. And he's like. Well. Maybe I'll do that. And maybe I won't. Those bad things. Those ugly things. Those things. When in fact. That really drive us to look for love. In the wrong places. Jesus is in this moment with you. And your situation.

Moves him to the point. Of his heart breaking. We don't have to be afraid. Because he's with us. But that's not how we approach him. See the problem is. Most of us would prefer. Not to go through the valley.

[24 : 03] We tend to approach him like. We say the shepherds wouldn't let me go in there. We say the shepherds wouldn't let me go in there. Attached. King. That's simply not the way life works though. And maybe he'll hear us. And maybe he won't. Like a judge waiting for an appeal.

Or something. Is trusting him to be with us. When in fact. Trusting him to lead us in the way. That's how we get through it. Wanting to free you from this void.

And the fact is. He's already freed you from it. But it's just not the way it's going to work. We don't always see it. Accept it or understand that. You know. One of the things that we really don't like. That's what breaks his heart.

Is when we find out we've wronged. We've done something wrong. We know we've made a mistake. We know we've wandered off the path. Receive what God is freely extending to us.

God corrects. And we. Just like those of us who have been around other young people. Those of us who have had to supervise people. Somebody makes a mistake. And so. It is not the loving thing.

[25 : 00] To keep letting them make the mistake. Came to the tomb. Right. It was a cave. You tell them. A stone laid across the earth. Things need to change. Take away the stone he said. But when you're a shepherd.

What do you use to help a sheep understand. That they're moving in the wrong direction. You use your rod. And your staff. By this time there's a bad odor. For he's been there. In other words. Four days. Your rod. And your staff.

Then Jesus said. Did I not tell you that if you believe. Because it shows me that you're still there. And it shows me you're not going to let me fall into that creek again. How many times have you told Jesus.

But. When we. Continue on this path. When you have a God. Who loves you like that. Because think of the journey we've been taking this morning. And you know these things to be true. So we open our hearts and recognize.

What happens in your life. Oh wow. I got to really believe that God can do what God said he can do. I may need to take and step that foot. See we think of blessing in such outlandish terms. Then we forget.

[25 : 53] We see a Jesus who is so moved by a situation that his heart breaks. And he wants to help you. Every breath. And knows he can. Every smile of a friend. And he says. Okay. Here's what you got to do.

That when you consider what it means for somebody to treat you special. You know back in biblical times. The most special thing you could do for someone. Was to anoint them.

That's how you. Well. Kings were chosen. Too obvious to talk about it. That's how people showed. That you had great work. Jesus says. Here's what you got to do. If you want to be free. Anoint my head with oil.

My cup. Runs with it. And then. Martha. Because remember. This is the same story. Not only do you have enough. Martha. The one who said. I believe you are the Christ. God will give you whatever you asked.

We are a blessed people. Because we have a shepherd. Jesus says. Okay. Who loves us. Take away the stone. Like that. And what's our reaction? And in the midst of this world.

[26 : 50] This world that does so much to steal our joy and break our spirits. Our challenge is to listen. To him. When we are loved to that degree.

If we say we believe him. If we know he is who he says he is. And if we know that his plans for us. His hope for us. Is good. The problem is.

And then he says. Is that we keep concentrating on the bad stuff. And forgetting. How good it is. Will you push back against it. Where we are.

Or will you receive it. Because. The Lord. See the thing is. There's always this sort of thing. With Jesus. Right. Some people.

Get. Loving and gracious God. We thank you for the gift it is. To know your love in this way. Poof and it happens. The fact that you. Continue. And all of us want to poof. Call to us when we wander off.

[27 : 44] It'd be nice. The fact that you will come get us. If our story had a poof. When we can't find our way home. That we can simply stop where we are. The story doesn't get a poof. We just heard that last week. I know. Right. That we are sick. Where Jesus spit on the ground. Rubbed the mud on the man's eyes.

And go wash in the pool. Circle us around. He could have said poof. That you. He didn't. Will defend us. That when the hill is brown. And there is nothing to sustain. So the problem then. Is if you get.

A set of instructions. We have more than enough. If you get a directive. That we can lay down. Will you simply listen. To the one whom you have said. God help us when we forget. How true that is. In our lives. You gonna put.

Your shoulder. Into that belief. And move our stone. Or do it. Or are you gonna get mad. The lights that reflect that truth. To a world. Because he didn't put so much hurt. So much loss.

So much pain. Because a lot of us spend our time doing it. Let us indeed remember. That we do not have to look for love. And we see that even in the story. Right. Because we are loved to. Because the moment after we see. That thing about Jesus weeping.

[28 : 40] By you. We get the debate. Amen. Like it's. It's quick. But it's a debate. Because it says Jesus wept. And then some go. See how much he loved him. But then others go.

Well. Talked about how the love of God. He's. Reaches out to us. Finds us. Holds us all. He's blind man. And not only do we talk about. How it finds us. But what that finding. The way Jesus wants to do things.

As you consider. How to live your faith. As you go from where you are this morning. Think about how you might volunteer. And give some time. And then we wonder. We need time. To help continue our ministry.

Through the fist friends. We need time. To help. With our Easter celebration. All of those are ways. In which you can give time. And energy. To support our ongoing ministries. Of the church. If you're looking for ways.

In which to give financially. You can also. Somebody had to put. They're back into this. They're back into this. And move the stone. So make sure you read that carefully. Whatever it is. God is telling you to do. There are opportunities. For fellowship.

[29 : 33] And study. We have our next tough questions. Bible study. And get this done. Coming up. A week from Tuesday. On the 28th. We also have our Lenten study. That's going on. On Thursdays. Both in the afternoons.

And in the evening. So. Please. Read your bulletin. And look at the website. Carefully. You can see all those opportunities. Explained in detail. But for now. Let us receive this blessing.

As we wake up. And we realize. That things are different. That we have a response. We've been praying. For things to be different. We wake up. And things are different. And it's scary. Go forth into the world.

Like I don't know what to do. Looking for love. Because I want to write to fix this. And now. I'm in this new place. And I don't like this new place. And I may prefer. To just go back to the devil I know. Instead of the angel I die.

And now. In the name of God. Our creator and king. In the name of Jesus Christ. Our Lord. Real world example. And our savior. In the name of the Holy Spirit. Our comforter. And our sustainer. Because if you Lazarus.

[30 : 25] In this moment. And God bless us. As we leave. This is a freak out time. In all God's children. Amen. Let's just be real. You were in your bed. Surrounded by those you love.

Now we don't know the circumstances. Of how Lazarus died. We just know he was ill. And he did die. So we're going to make a leap. Based on the idea of he was ill. That probably means. They got him in the house.

He had loved ones around him. Taking care of him. And he passed away. Now we don't know. If he saw the other side. Or if he just. Went into complete blackness.

We don't know that. But what we do know. Is that he was probably in his bed. And then he woke up. With a burial shroud on his face. And wrapped up.

Like a dead person. With the smell of other dead people. All around him. No idea where he was.

[31 : 24] As I said. Sometimes when we get on the other side of the change. We don't recognize where we are. It's scary.

And it causes a freak out. But what happens in this moment. Is that.

You hear. The voice. Of your Lord. Lazarus. Come out. Will you keep moving.

Toward his voice. Will you trust. That he's got you. Even though you don't understand. What's going on. Will you trust. That he's bringing you.

Where he needs you to be. Can you move. Towards the light. Can you move. Toward what you recognize. Can you recognize his voice. And follow.

[32 : 26] Even when it's unfamiliar. Even when it's scary. Even when you're scared. Will you. Still. Follow him. Last point.

I want to make for you. As we get to the end of the story. And what Jesus says. Take off his burial clothes. And let him go. Side point.

Is that those who love you. Will help you be free. Those who love you. Will help you. Be free. In other words. The people who really.

Want you. To keep taking these steps. Will not leave you bound. Take off. His clothes. That means people around him.

Had to do it. He's like this. Help those. You know need help. And let those who love you. And let those who love you.

[33 : 26] Help you. Trust that you've already been set free. By Jesus. But the people in your life who get it. The people in your life who get him.

And the people in your life who love you. Will not leave you bound. They will help you. Be free. So all of this.

Brings us. To our reality. Because that thing. That we have surrendered control to. The thing that is dictating us. And sending us.

In all these bad directions. In other words. Either that. Thing itself. Is either a wrong place. Or. It puts us.

Into a place of stress. And guilt. And worry. And because of it. We go looking for comfort. As you have already seen. In all the wrong places. When Jesus.

[34 : 28] Is the right answer. So today friends. We are going to take a moment. We're going to extend. The time. That blank sheet of paper.

Or your friendship card. That I gave you. If there is something. That is in your life right now. That you want to be free of. Then I invite you.

To name it. In other words. Write it on the card. Because sometimes. That's how we can take control of things. There's a great quote.

By American scholar. And writer. Named James Baldwin. What James Baldwin said was. Not everything that is faced. Can be changed. But nothing will be changed.

Until it is faced. So name. What holds you. And. If you are willing.

[35 : 27] Simply come up. There is a basket here in the front. As you come down for communion. Put your. Particular thing. Your card. Whatever. In the basket.

Now. You can stay anonymous. You don't have to tell. Any of us. Who it is. But know. That we are going to spend. A lot of time.

Praying over those things. Trusting that God. Will already know. Who wrote it. God will already know. What you need. But we are going to pray for you. In that way. That you might experience.

That freedom. Surrender it. To God. Surrender it. To God. Also during communion. If you would like to spend some time in prayer.

We will be available over here. At the altar room. And if you want someone to pray with you. We will pray with you. You don't have to do that. That is optional. It is just that it is available for you.

[36 : 25] If you would like it. But here is the key. During this time. If you would seek to be free. Hear the words of the psalm.

Because one of our challenge here. Is that often we will pray. Just like we talked about Martha. But our challenge for a lot of us. Is we got to pray in expectation. We got to pray in faith.

We may say words. But there is that part of us that is like. Well I am going to say this. But I don't really know that anything is going to happen. Or I know that I can do this.

But I am not all the way in on. Believing that there is a God. Who hears this prayer. Receives it. And is standing there. Just like we said about Jesus. Wanting to help you.

When you pray. And you know that that is on the other side of the pray. You pray differently. And that is our hope. That if you can take that step.

[37 : 28] And know that freedom. That is what we mean by look to your liberator today. Because our God wants good things for you.

Not bad things. Our God promises joy. And freedom. And peace. Not guilt. And stress. And burden. So if you would be free.

Stop looking for love in the wrong places. And look to the one who sets you free indeed. Amen.

And amen. Loving and gracious God. Thank you for the ways in which you have shown us love. Thank you for loving us. Even though we don't fully get it. That we do our best.

And we still don't get it. But you still show up. That we show up angry and disappointed. We show up wanting things to go the way we want them to go.

[38 : 32] Instead of listening to you. Lord God. Help us to understand that you offer the more excellent way. That in you we can know real freedom.

Real peace. And real love. And not the false promises and disappointments of the world. Lord. We open our hearts to you anew. Come to us afresh.

Receive these things that we surrender today. That we might know the freedom that you give. That we can take those steps forward in faith. And let us hold you high by how we live our lives.

Let us be a bold and bright reflection of what happens when you know and love Jesus. Let the world come and see.

Because you are worthy. Amen. So today we spend a lot of time talking about being free.

[39 : 31] You know we said it every week of our series. We are forgiven. Loved. And freed. I hope those words ring true for you today in a fresh way.

We are forgiven. Loved. And freed. Take that freedom that God has so given to you. And use it to be a blessing to God in a number of ways.

There are any number of opportunities to live your faith over the course of the coming week. We still need volunteers for our Easter celebration. We still need volunteers to sign up for our fish fries.

These last two that are coming up. If you would like to go further in your faith. We have our tough stuff Bible study coming up on Tuesday. Our regular Lenten Bible study coming up on Thursday. There are any other number of opportunities to serve as well.

Please use your bulletin. Check the website if you are online. There is a ton of information about ways in which you can put some effort behind your faith.

[40 : 33] And now let's receive our benediction. Remember we do have a response today. Go forth into the world. Looking for love in all the right places. Now in the name of God our creator and king.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and our Savior. And in the name of the Holy Spirit. Our counselor and our sustainer. May God bless us as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children.

Amen. Amen. Amen.