

*“He who has ears, let him hear.”* Jesus said this a number of times. But what about he who has no ears? The prophet Ezekiel spoke the Word of God to bones. Dead, dry bones, with no ears. And yet these bones were raised. Muscles and skin came upon them, and they came to life. Jesus spoke to a man who was in the tomb four days. His ears were dead along with the rest of him. And still, Lazarus came to life.

It seems as if those without ears hear better than those who have ears. At the time of Ezekiel, God called His people to repentance. They had ears, but they did not listen. They refused to repent. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the chief priests gathered with the Pharisees and came to the decision that Jesus had to be put to death. They heard the report that Jesus gave life to a dead man. But hearing, they refused to listen. They closed their ears to this great sign, intent on silencing Jesus once and for all.

*“He who has ears, let him hear.”* At one time you were like Lazarus, in a spiritual sense. Your ears were dead along with the rest of you. This is how we are born into the world. Having ears, and yet deaf to the truth of God. Having physical life, but not spiritual life. Sealed up within this tomb by powers far too great for us to overcome; the powers of darkness: sin, death, and the devil.

Lazarus could not have come out from his tomb by himself. He could not raise himself to life. Nor can we. They are dead wrong, those who teach that we can, by our own power, decide to believe in Jesus. Lazarus had no choice but to remain dead. And that is the only choice that we have at birth. It was Jesus who made the decision to raise Lazarus to life. Not partly Jesus and partly Lazarus. It was all Jesus. Lazarus had nothing to do with his resurrection.

Nor do we. To God alone be glory. In your baptism, Jesus called to you, as He called to Lazarus, and He brought you to life. He brought you out from under the powers of darkness. He forgave your sins. He gave you the life that cannot die. In your baptism, Jesus gave you, we can say, spiritual ears. And he who has ears, let him hear.

But speaking for myself, it appears that I heard better before I had such ears than I do now. What about you? Before we were raised to life in our baptism, we had no choice but to remain dead in our sins. The choice belonged to God. And in mercy He gave us life, spiritual life in Christ. And now we have choices. Only those who have life can make choices.

But shame on us for the choices we make. Shame on us for choosing not to hear, closing our ears to the words of Jesus. Shame on us for choosing evil over good. For making sinful choices. Choosing to let our flesh have its way. For not putting to death the lustful Old Adam in us day after day. We agree with St. Paul who moans: *“Wretched man that I am! ...I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”*

Thank God that He continues to choose life for us. After He raised Lazarus to life, Jesus gave a command proving this. *“Unbind him, and let him go.”* Lazarus came out of the tomb, it says,

*“his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth.”* How could he live like that? He was a walking mummy. Alive, and yet completely bound. And he could not unbind himself. Someone else had to unbind him. And so, not to Lazarus, but to those near him, Jesus commanded: *“Unbind him, and let him go.”*

That same command He gives to your pastor. “Unbind them, and let them go.” Unbind them of their sins. Free them from their stinking burial cloths. Forgive them. *“Unbind him, and let him go.”*

How can we live all wrapped up in our sins? Even the baptized fall into sin. Sin is a great power. A power of darkness. When our sins bind us, we become like walking mummies, like Lazarus the way he emerged from the tomb.

The sinful choices we make rob us of the life that Jesus gives us in our baptism. And we cannot free ourselves of our stinking sins anymore than Lazarus could free himself from his burial cloths. Indeed, our sins will bury us unless Jesus delivers us.

And He does. With His command, “Unbind them, and let them go,” He frees you from the power of sin. He releases you from that which has wrapped you up. It matters not how ugly your sins. It matters not how tightly bound your sins have made you. As Jesus’ word of command released Lazarus, so this same word of command releases you.

You are forgiven. All your sins are forgiven. And it’s because Jesus was bound for you. He went to His cross all wrapped up in your sins. And so, you are free of them. Free to live the life Jesus gives you in your baptism. You are free to make good choices in life. You are free to use the ears Jesus gave you to hear His words of life.

Not only do you have life in Christ Jesus through your baptism, you have His words of life in your ears. His unbinding word that releases you from your sins. Amen.