If you’ve been at a presbytery meeting in the last year, you will have noticed that John’s story of the unbound Lazarus (John 11) has been our shaping scripture for our shared life of faith.

In June, the unbinding of Lazarus was used as a metaphor for denominational grants which are unbinding congregations. Many denominational agencies are providing financial resources to those congregations and campus ministries who are willing to risk new ways of being church. Remember that blue folder that was given out at our June presbytery meeting? It was chock full of financial resources to help pastors and congregations stretch dimes into dollars. *Pull it out and look at it again in preparation for 2020. Can’t find it? Follow these links to see the resources that were shared at this meeting.*

During our October meeting, the unbinding of Lazarus was a metaphor for the congregations in our midst who are willing to be loosened from binding – even blinding! -- practices or tight traditions.

**Scripture requires repeat percolation.**

**It becomes more flavorful the more you savor -- and sit in -- its rich and robust truths.**

As we prepare for Advent and the swaddling-bound Savior, I hope you’ll use these questions as a means of personal and communal conversation – and conversion – in worship or Bible Study!

Jesus completes 3 significant acts as this Biblical narrative draws to a close, inviting the gathering community to do the following:

* roll away the stone
* overhear his prayer, so that they might know that God sent him into the world
* unwrap and set free the enlivened Lazarus

Jesus has never been a “solo pilot” Savior. Intentional and invitational, he calls each unsteady soul or uncertain community to collaboration and cooperation. **His commitment to community makes all the difference.**

 Questions for Individual or Group Reflection

 **SEPARATING STONES**

1. What are the stones which are separating us from abundant life with Jesus? Personally? Communally?
2. Are there healthy and faithful ways to remove those stones in our shared life?
3. How can we become empowered and equipped to remove these stones?
4. What will we do specifically to become empowered and equipped and how will we partner with one another in accountability and encouragement?

**ENCOURAGED EAVESDROPPING**

1. How might we pray in such a way that the world wants to “lean in” and hear? What kind of words will this type of prayer require? What kinds of actions? What kind of listening?
2. What is it that we hope people will come to know specifically about our Savior Jesus and the God who sends him – and us – into the world?

**UNIFIED in UNBINDING**

1. What binds us? Positively? Negatively?
2. How can we unbind one another from that which constricts us from serving our Savior? What can we do to encourage one another as individuals?
3. How can we collaborate and cooperate with congregations or campuses that need to be unbound?

**Blessing for our Life Together**

Wholly unafraid of hard situations or stony hearts.

may we live as a Savior-sent people.

Clear-eyed and courageous,

tender and tenacious,

may we connect readily with our neighbors,

 inviting them -- *not to church* – but to life!

Loosened and enlivened by Jesus’ love,

 may we unwrap fear or frustration from our communities

and offer solace, steadiness, and the strength of faith.

**May this Advent find you wrapped up in the birth of Jesus and the blessings that this newness of life brings!**

\*created for FRP by DKTregaskis (October 2019)