

Lazarus, Come Out!

"Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Reflection by Ed Keithly –



Two and a half years ago I was in debt. It built up slowly from bad habits—impulse buys, Starbucks every morning, never packing a lunch—but the cause and size of the debt is kind of beside the point. The biggest problem was my shame about the debt. And shame, the tricky monster that it is, was easier to ignore than to face. At my lowest point, I felt like Lazarus: alone, entombed, my hands and feet bound by cloths of debt.

Then one day I heard an interview with one of my favorite stand-up comedians, Maria Bamford. She talked about her recent marriage and the challenges they faced as a couple—for Maria, mental health; for her husband, debt. When I heard Maria name that, heard that she loved her husband anyway – loved him because he was honest about his debt – it was like hearing Jesus' words: "Lazarus, come out!"

I resolved to tell my better half that I was in debt. It was one of the scariest things I've ever done. Shame told me that she'd think less of me, even leave me. Instead, she thanked me for sharing and helped me plan to fix it; she helped me form the habits to get out of debt. It was hard, but every day felt like an unraveling of the cloths that bound Lazarus. Today I'm debt free and have a rainy-day fund. But, more

importantly, my relationship with my better half is deeper, and the shame monster was banished.

She and I are engaged now, and I'm finding that pre-marital counseling has a lot to say about the intersection of our money, relationship and faith. I wish I'd known sooner how well-equipped the Church is to help with issues of finance and rule of life. And I find myself wondering if it's possible for our churches to be places where we really talk about money, in every season. I wonder if churches could be places where we don't just talk about what the Church can accomplish with our money, but also the bone-deep ways money affects us—the sense of self-worth, the feelings of shame and inadequacy, of hope and security.

Two years ago, hearing a call to increase my pledge wasn't business as usual, it was terrifying. If you find yourself in such a place, I hope you'll pledge instead to respond to Jesus' call: "Lazarus, come out!" I hope you'll share your story with your loved ones, your priest. I didn't have to face my debt alone—in fact, I couldn't. Jesus calls us all out of the tomb in to new life, and there's a community of saints waiting to help us find the way.

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Reflection Questions

- Lazarus wasn't the only one to receive 'new life' as a result of this miracle of Jesus. Martha comes to a living faith and receives the 'new life' of Jesus Christ.
 - How did you come to faith in Jesus Christ?
 - What actions of others were instrumental in this?
- Was there ever a time when you saw God glorified in a situation even when it did not go according to your expectations? What happened as a result?
- As with Martha, Jesus leads us to take steps forward in faith. How might a new or renewed commitment show itself in your life?
- Take some time to pray that the Lord would unbind you from debt, doubt and discouragement so that you can live in fullness the new life which he gives.

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