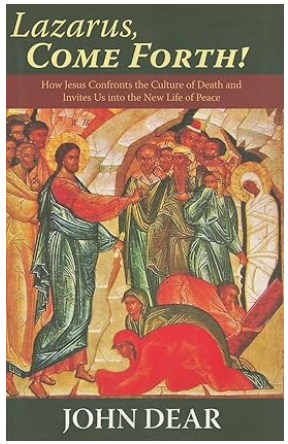
SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — February 22, 2026

Theme for Lent: "Called Out from Our Cultures of Death to God's Reign of Life"

Based on John Dear's book on the Gospel of John, *Lazarus, Come Forth!: How Jesus Confronts the Culture of Death and Invites Us into the New Life of Peace*



Lenten Gospels:
1. Matthew 4: Temptations of Jesus
2. John 3: Jesus and Nicodemus
3. John 4: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman
4. John 9: Jesus heals the man born blind
5. John 11: Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead — the climactic sign before the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus

John Dear's book proposes seeing Lazarus as representing all of humanity so that it can be considered "the key to the entire Gospel": "The story of this raising is John's way of dramatizing how Jesus has come to call everyone and every culture out of the tombs of death into the new life of peace." We will read all of the Gospels in Lent through the lens of this theme, looking for the two elements within the theme:

- **Culture of Death**: what deadly aspect of our sin is being revealed in each text?
- **New Life of Peace**: how does Jesus liberate us from that aspect of our sin to invite us into the way of peace?

Reading these two elements through this week's Bible passages. Sin is attempting to control others instead of loving others. And with the first two readings we have the legacy of St. Augustine's choosing *inheritance* as the metaphor for being in sin. The first man and woman sinned and we all inherit it. Are we locked into sin until we die? Better choices of metaphor for sin are *contagion* or *enslavement*. The power of love can heal us or liberate us for new life now — in love!

A Glimpse of the New Life of Peace this week comes from Gov. J.B. Pritzker of Illinois, his State of the State Address this past Wednesday:

I've been thinking a lot lately about love – about loving people and loving your country and the power involved in both. . . . Love is a superpower – it teaches the brittle to bend, it shows the selfish how to share, it grants courage to the coward. . . .

I also know that love unrequited can break a heart made fragile by dashed hope. Which is why it's important for me to stand before you today and tell you that your country is loving you back – just not in the way you are used to hearing. It's not speaking in anthems or flags or ostentatious displays of patriotism. It will never come from the people who say the only way to love America is to hate Americans.

Love is found in every act of courage – large and small – taken to preserve the country we once knew. You will find it in homes and schools and churches and art. It is there; it has not been squashed.

Over the last 12 months, I've heard love start to shout here in Illinois. I heard it from the bicyclers who showed up in Little Village every day during Operation Midway Blitz to buy out tamale carts so the vendors could return to the safety of their homes. I heard it from the parishioners who formed human chains around churches so that immigrants could worship. I heard it from the moms in the school pick up line who whipped out their cameras and their whistles. I saw it in the face of every Midwesterner who put on their heaviest coat and protested outside on the coldest day.

I am begging my fellow politicians, my fellow Illinoisans, my fellow Americans to realize that right now in this country we are not fighting over policy or political party. We are fighting over whether we are going to be a civilization rooted in empathy and kindness — or one rooted in cruelty and rage. What you choose to arm yourself with in this fight – love or hate – exposes which side you are fighting on. Only the weakest of people believe that love is the weakest of weapons. And it turns out that love actually is all around – and that those who think that cruelty can destroy it are incapable of understanding the power of a nation moved by it.

I love my country. I refuse to stop. The hope I have found in a very difficult year is that love is the light that gets you through a long night.