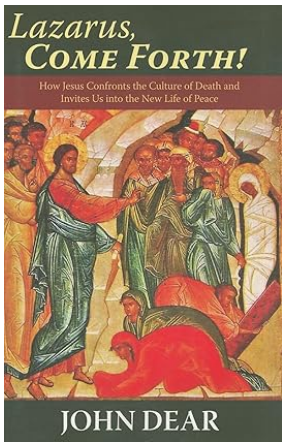
Excerpt Page for Lent 4 (from John Dear) — March 15, 2026

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

Excerpt from 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* (Orbis, 2011), pp. 28-29.



In John's chapter 9 we come to one of the most extraordinary of all the Gospel tales, the account of the blind man. One Sabbath day in the Temple, Jesus walks by and sees "a man born blind from birth" — the word *anthropos* meaning not just a single "man" but also all of "humanity." John takes us into deep water again. He places an allegory on our hands. He's portraying the human moral condition: we are all of us blind from birth. When the visionary Jesus heals the blind man, he heals all of us from darkness into the light of vision that we might see one another and live in peace.

But Jesus' healing is not without opposition. The authorities feel slighted and affronted and determine to discredit the man. He's hauled before them for interrogation; after him, his parents. As for Jesus, they cast him in a disreputable light: he's a fraud, a sinner. But the man presses back, saying a healer like that can come only from God — an act of insubordination that outrages them further. "And they drove him out."

Hearing of the man's excommunication, Jesus looks for him on the outskirts of the Temple and there receives the man's worship. There, outside the Temple, the two of them cast out, Jesus finally receives the faith he seeks — not from the dutiful religious but the excommunicated marginalized.

In this unnamed character, we find a model, a disciple ready to suffer and die for his allegiance to the life-giving, nonviolent Jesus. One thinks the story was meant to encourage the struggling Johannine *agape* community. But it crosses the millennia and strengthens us as well. Cultures of death may well reject us, but we need not fear. Put your faith in the God of life and all will be well.

Excerpt from John Dear's *Universal Love: Surrendering to the God of Peace* (Orbis Books, 2025), pages 3-5.

In this new book John Dear recounts a spiritual journey that he underwent with a young man named "Will." It began during the COVID pandemic, when his normal schedule was on hold. His life was limited to working on a book on the Gospels and to working out in a gym to try staying healthy. There, a young gym instructor named "Will" asked him to be his spiritual director. The following recounts the beginning of that relationship; the book as a whole recounts the entire journey of practicing meditation as the key to living in God's Universal Love.

Turning toward Universal Love and Peace

So there I was working out in gym class one day in the summer of 2020, in the early days of the COVID pandemic, and Will, the new, young gym instructor, said to me, "I've been reading about you and your work online, and I would like you to be my guru."

I've been called a lot of things, but never a guru, so I laughed. I agreed to meet with him and talk about the spiritual life. I said I would become his spiritual director.

When we first sat down to talk, I asked him, "Do you believe in God?"

"No," he said.

"Okay," I said. "What do you believe in?"

After thinking about it, he answered, "I believe in truth and love and compassion."

"That works for me," I said.

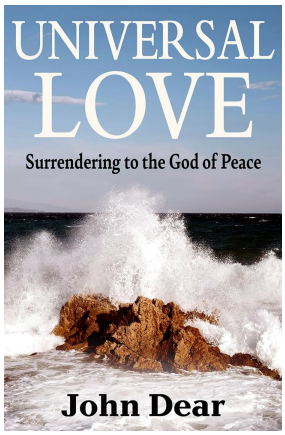
Christians believe that God is truth, love, and compassion, I said. Gandhi went so far as to say, "Truth is God." The New Testament says, "God is love." My problem, I continued, is with the word *love*. "It's lost its meaning. The New Testament uses the Greek word *agape*, which means unconditional, all-encompassing, nonviolent, universal love. So I think of God as Universal Love."

"That works for me," he said. "I want to learn how to meditate because when I took a class in world religions in college, I saw how important it is for a well-rounded life."

"Okay," I said, "if you want to step into the spiritual life and learn about prayer and meditation, try to spend thirty minutes in silence every day and ask Universal Love to be with you and speak to you. This is what I try to do. In other words, instead of talking about the God of Universal Love or the spiritual life, go and experience Universal Love, then get back to me."

He had never been to church, and had no interest in church, but he was interested in meditation, so he accepted the challenge.

Becoming an Extension of Universal Love and Peace



A week later Will came over to visit me in my little cabin along the Central Coast. He told me that he had been sitting in silent meditation every day and had been focusing on his breath, so that he was sitting very still and breathing consciously. Then one day he became overwhelmed with a sense of peace and joy that he had never known before. He felt he was in the presence of Universal Love. He'd simply never had an experience like it. He cried while trying to describe it.

I admit that I was surprised that he had achieved such quick rewards from his practice. But over the decades I had heard this before. If we open our hearts and souls to God, God can rush in like a flood and fill us with love and peace.

Already, Will's experience of Universal Love had led him to moments of bliss in which he felt unconditionally loved, and realized that every human being was unconditionally loved and that, from now on, he too could practice unconditional love toward every human being and all creation.

In that profound spiritual moment, he told me, he realized his calling in life: "I'm created to be an extension of Universal Love."