

**Come Out of the Tomb: Grief, Disillusionment, and the Resurrection of Life**  
**Sunday, March 22, 2026, 10 a.m.**  
**All Saints Church, Pasadena**  
**The Rev. Jonathan T. Stoner**

There's a grief that isn't about death. It's the grief of disillusionment, when someone you trusted, admired, or followed as a moral guide turns out to be something else entirely.

Many of us are living in that grief right now. This week brought devastating revelations about César Chávez, who for so many, including me, stood for hope, courage, and nonviolence, a conviction that true strength is shown through selfless sacrifice for justice. And now, a more painful truth has come to light.

Dolores Huerta, a giant of the farmworker movement, has spoken of what she endured, silenced for fear of harming the cause she devoted her life to:

"I didn't feel I could say no because he was someone I admired... my boss and the leader of the movement I had already devoted years of my life to."

The assaults by Chávez resulted in two pregnancies. Huerta kept them secret and arranged for the children to be raised by families who could provide stable lives. She now names herself not as a victim, but as a survivor:

"I now understand that I am a survivor, of violence, of sexual abuse, of domineering men who saw me, and other women, as property or things to control."

Her words remind us that disillusionment is embodied. It shapes lives, families, and generations, and it isn't just about one person. Systems often protect power and silence the vulnerable.

As Rebecca Solnit writes: "the whole legal system" in our country "was set up to disbelieve women and girls... and put women who reported rape on trial for their sexual history... The system was designed to silence women."

This includes boys who reported abuse by scout leaders, priests, or others in positions of power.

For much of human history, survivors had nowhere to go, no one to listen, no path to justice. Thank God that is changing. Slowly, imperfectly, but it is changing.

Even now, signs of quiet resurrection appear: truths being told, voices once silenced being heard, accountability beginning to take shape.

Solnit writes, “Success for many environmental campaigns is the river that was not dammed or polluted, the forest that was not cut down, the species that did not go extinct, the oil wells that were not dug, the coal that was not burned.”

Even though these victories are often invisible, they matter deeply.

The same is true for social movements seeking justice and accountability: harms prevented, perpetrators deterred, survivors supported, systems slowly reshaped.

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This kind of disillusionment we’re feeling this weekend isn’t new. Many of us have felt it in the church. I know I have.

On my spiritual journey, from evangelical roots to Orthodox and Catholic communities, to mainline churches, I’ve seen ideals collide with human failings. I’ve witnessed leaders fall, authority betrayed, systems fail, and innocent lives harmed. These weren’t isolated incidents. They were patterns, often dismissed with a shrug and that same old refrain: “Well, boys will be boys.”

It made me question everything, including my own call to ministry. I didn’t want to become what I had seen.

This grief is real, and it is everywhere. Some call it “cancel culture,” but a more biblical word is *apocalypse*: an unveiling, the truth coming to light.

Human beings are complicated. We are capable of great good and great harm, especially when power goes unchecked. Power can distort, isolate, corrupt, and convince us the rules don’t apply. We have seen it in church, politics, and movements that began with a thirst for justice and righteousness but lost their way. And if we’re honest, we glimpse it in ourselves.

The problem isn’t just leadership. It is the pedestal. We put people where they don’t belong, asking them to carry what no human can carry. When they fall, something inside us feels like it dies. A hope, a belief, a sense of stability. It feels like standing at a tomb.

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This weekend would have been Mister Rogers’ 98th birthday. He understood that being human means feeling deeply: anger, grief, confusion, even rage.

In one of his most well-known songs, he asked a simple, searching question:

*What do you do with the mad you feel?*

He didn't rush past what many call "negative emotions." He showed that naming our feelings is not weakness. It is the beginning of honesty. And we need that honesty now.

Because, as Richard Rohr says: "pain that is not transformed is transmitted."

What we refuse to face doesn't disappear. It seeps into our relationships, our communities, our lives.

So we do something countercultural. We stay. We sit with the grief. We name it. We refuse to numb it or rush past it.

And in that honest naming, something begins to shift. Not all at once. Not neatly. But truly. When grief is witnessed, when truth is spoken, when pain is held instead of hidden, the first signs of resurrection appear.

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### **Jesus at Lazarus' Tomb: Grief, Power, and Life**

It is here, in this place of grief and expectation, that we turn to John 11.

In Bethany, we meet Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. People who knew Jesus, loved him, trusted him. Scripture is clear: Jesus loved them. They were his chosen family.

So when illness comes, they do the most human thing imaginable. They send word:

"Lord, the one you love is ill."

A simple message, full of trust and hope, quietly assuming that love will show up.

But Jesus doesn't come right away. Inexplicably. Maddeningly. He waits. By the time he arrives, Lazarus has been dead four days.

Martha meets him first:

"Lord, if you had been here... my brother would not have died."

Not just grief, disappointment, confusion, probably anger. Where were you?

Mary later echoes the same words:

"Lord, if you had been here..."

It is the cry of every heart that has trusted and been let down. If you had been here... if the system had worked... if the harm hadn't happened.

Jesus doesn't defend himself. He doesn't lecture. He asks only:

"Where have you laid him?"

And then, in perhaps the shortest and most profound verse in Scripture:

Jesus wept.

He weeps before anything is fixed. Before Lazarus is raised. Before life is restored.

God isn't distant from our grief. God isn't indifferent to our pain. God does not stand apart offering platitudes like, "Everything happens for a reason." No. God stands at the tomb and weeps.

For anyone here who has ever been harmed, betrayed, or disillusioned, hear this clearly: God isn't on the side of power that exploits. God is with you, at the tomb, weeping.

This is what we do as a community. We name the grief. We speak the truth about disappointment, betrayal, and anger. We bring it into the open and hold it before God together.

Even here, as we sit in sackcloth and ashes, the Spirit hovers over us like a mother, whispering over what feels dead in our lives and in this world, singing it back to life with a lifegiving lullaby.

We may feel exhausted, on the brink of despair, but the One who speaks life is still at work. God attaches sinews to us, puts flesh on our bones, covers us with skin, and breathes life into us. Even when our voices falter, God hears our cries from the depths.

This is the grief we carry in the valley of the shadow of death. And this is the hope we witness: God doesn't abandon us in the tomb. God stands with us, weeping with us, singing over us, calling us back to life.

Even when death seems to have the final word.

Even when the tomb appears permanent.

Even when all seems lost.

God is still at work.

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### **Accountability and Positional Humility**

As we sit in this grief, I want to speak honestly about my own place in the world. I'm a white, straight male, fast approaching middle age, carrying privileges I can't ignore. Even with the best intentions, I misstep. I fail. I can perpetuate harm, often without realizing it.

That's why accountability matters. Not for shame or scolding, but as a path to faithful living: to listen, to act, to examine our biases, to stand with the vulnerable, and to shape a community where great power carries great responsibility, and that responsibility is the thriving of all creatures great and small.

Now I may have just spoiled every Spider-Man movie for you, but that's really what they're about at their core.

Accountability requires humility, the courage to recognize the authority we hold and the ways we can unintentionally hurt others. It asks us to face ourselves honestly, even amid grief and disillusionment.

But here's the good news this morning. Even in failure, betrayal, and broken systems, there is hope. God doesn't leave us in the tomb. God meets us in grief, at the place of loss and disappointment, and calls forth life.

In John 11, Jesus goes to the tomb even when death seems final and brings resurrection into the pit of despair.

But the story isn't just about one man being raised. All of us search for resurrection, someone or something to restore hope, justice, and life. We turn to leaders, movements, institutions, heroes, and again and again, we end up at a tomb.

Any pedestal we build for a human will eventually become a tomb. Not because people are uniquely terrible, but because we are human.

That's why Jesus shifts the focus. He doesn't point to another human or movement. He says plainly:

"I am the resurrection and the life."

Not "I will bring it someday." I am it. Right here. Right now.

The Gospel doesn't invite us to find better heroes. It calls us to stop looking for resurrection in human beings and to place our trust in the One who stands outside the tomb, calling us into life.

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## **Hope, Community, and Unbinding**

As Dolores Huerta reminds us:

“The farmworker movement has always been bigger and far more important than any one individual... We must continue to engage and support our community, which needs advocacy and activism now more than ever.”

Those words resonate here at All Saints. Our mission, to love, seek justice, serve life, is bigger than any one person. We are imperfect, flawed, sometimes harmful. And yet, that doesn't stop the work. It doesn't silence the call.

Langston Hughes reminds us that even as a nation we have never fully lived up to our highest ideals. We have failed, harmed, fallen short. And yet the ideals themselves, the call to justice, love, and life, remain. Worth holding up. Worth striving toward. Worth living into, together.

The invitation is simple: grieve. Grieve disappointment, disillusionment, harm. Don't rush past it. Jesus didn't. But don't stop there.

The story does not end at the tomb. The voice of the One who has conquered death calls us out of despair and cynicism:

“Come out.”

This call is for the world and for us. Even as we grieve fallen leaders, we must look in the mirror of our own community. We must reckon with attitudes that excused domination, unfaithfulness, and exploitation. Unaccountable power exists in every human institution. We are called to step into accountability now, so the cycle doesn't continue.

Resurrection is collective. It is the unbinding of communities, the restoration of relationships, the reweaving of connections once broken. It requires confronting material and spiritual harm: economic inequities, spiritual privilege, moral injury. Grief isn't only about fallen leaders. It is about ourselves, our institutions, and the patterns of power we inherit.

We grieve, yes. We hold the pain, yes. But we don't stop there. The voice calling us out of the tomb calls us to action, humility, truth-telling, and unbinding. Stop building pedestals. Walk humbly.

Share power. Hold one another accountable. Tell the truth. Unbind one another. Place our trust not in ourselves, not in leaders, not in institutions, but in the One who is, and always will be, the resurrection and the life.

Step into life. Step into justice. Step into the resurrection God is bringing forth. Not in one person, not in a flawless hero, not in one church or political party, but in all of us, together.

This is our invitation. This is our hope. This is what it means to be the Body of Christ.

Amen.

