

**I remember the day that Carter came to the Center
as a new gentleman in our Pathway to Sobriety program.
The best way to describe him is sullen.**

**He sat on the couch in the Parlor during a staff meeting with his head down
his legs and arms crossed...totally turned in on himself.
His physical detoxing was still in process
and his emotional and spiritual healing had barely just begun.**

**As the days turned into weeks and the weeks into months,
you could literally see Carter begin to open and
begin to blossom once again into the man he once was...**

**Carter...as I remember is one of the lucky ones...
His family celebrated his recovery and welcomed him back into
the family events and gatherings...**

**Not all the men are so lucky.
some of them have done such truly harmful things,
not all of them are welcomed back into the hearts and lives
of those that they are the closest to...**

**I remember the conversations I once had with a woman that I shall call Betty...
She said that her mother repeatedly told her how stupid and inept she was...
that she would never amount to much and lo and behold...
while by all outside appearances,
Betty's mother's predictions didn't seem to have come true,
she had lots of friends, a great marriage and a wonderful job..
when you talked to Betty...you could tell they had, at least from Betty's perspective
because she rarely felt 'good enough' or capable or competent.**

Betty and Carter were entombed...

they were still not fully alive because of the opinions and judgments of their families...

Because their families put them in a box with labels...they were still bound tightly and not free to come into their full humanity...

they were not free to grow into who they were created to be....

One of the most harmful things we do to each other as human beings is put each other in boxes and categories with negative labels such as: lazy or dumb or selfish or immature.

When we do that, we put people in the tomb, so to speak...

put them 'over there'... we separate from them,

perhaps so we can feel better than they?

Very often they take on these identities,

and thus take on an identity which keeps them from ever changing and growing...

But sometimes, sometimes...

people do change...they do recover...

they, in a metaphorical sense, do rise from their deadly ways of living...

they do rise from the tomb of their harmful behavior...

but until we unbind them from our judgments and

let them loose from the labels that we have given them...

they cannot yet begin to fully live again

In our reading today, Jesus calls to Lazarus to come out...

and he does...life has begun to breathe in Lazarus once again...

but he is still bound with strips of cloth...and his face is still hidden...

Jesus then says to the people gathered: Unbind him and let him go.

This directive is so very, very important...

**People can and do change...it does happen.
And when it does, when they come back to life...
we must be willing to unbind them from our judgments...
we must be willing to take off the labels of what they used to be like,
so that we can see who they have become...**

**Oftentimes, people put themselves into the tomb...
because of their choices and actions...**

**But sometimes...
we put people into the tomb by our
opinions and judgments....**

**Think about how often in families we say:
oh...he's the smart one,
she's the kind one...
he's the funny one,
or she's lazy one...**

**We do it all the time, not intentionally to cause harm,
but it can be very harmful and limiting...**

**Putting labels on people: children or adults,
quickly entombs them into a category, a box.
We think we know what to expect, what they will or will not do...
and since we will only see what we are looking for,
we most likely won't recognize the "more" of who people always are....**

**I remember how our youngest daughter,
when she was little... was always being silly...
so she gained the reputation of being the clown of the family...
and she was, and still is...very funny.**

**The problem was, that she also had a very deep and serious side to her.
As she grew into her teenage and adult years
it took sometime for us to recognize her ability and desire to be thoughtful,
reflective and not always the family clown....**

**We had to unbind her from our opinions and judgments...
so that we could see her larger, true self...
which was so much more than we had ever known before...**

**Labels, opinions, judgments for good and for ill...
bind a person and restrict a person from growing into the fullness
of who they were created to be...**

**We can quit labeling and judging ourselves...
always open to the 'more' of who we really are...
We can quit self limiting talk:
such as I'm never good at sports, or I am not artistic
I'm always a klutz...wah, wah, wah,wah, wah....**

**and We can help to set other people free...
we can call people out of their tombs and,
remove the bands, the labels that are inhibiting and restrictive...
We can help them show their real and true face...**

So for all of this and so much more, we can always say, thank you! amen.

