

# COME FORTH

*March 22, 2026*

*John 11:1–45 with Ezekiel 37:1–14 and Romans 8:1–11*

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## ***I. Words Inside the Stone***

In 79 AD, Mount Vesuvius buried the Roman city of Herculaneum under sixty feet of volcanic ash. Among the ruins: a library of hundreds of papyrus scrolls, scorched into solid black cylinders of carbon. Scholars knew the words were in there. They also knew that any attempt to open the scrolls would destroy them. For 1,700 years, the library was entombed — sealed, silent, apparently lost forever.

Then in 2023, a team used X-ray scanners and artificial intelligence to read the scrolls from the outside. In 2024, a 21-year-old student named Luke Farritor became the first person in two millennia to read those ancient words. The entombed library spoke again.

Words. A tomb. Darkness that seems permanent. The impossibility of rescue by human hands alone. Hold that image. Everything in this sermon lives inside it.

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## ***II. What God Wrote in You***

Before we talk about the tomb, we have to talk about what was written. God wrote something magnificent in you: love the Lord your God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. That is not a burden. That is the architectural blueprint of a human being fully alive — the description of the eternal kingdom in daily practice.

Ezekiel sees it as an army. God drops him into a valley of dry bones and asks the question every one of us must answer: "Son of man, can these bones live?" God's intended answer is not bones on a valley floor. It is a vast army, standing upright, animated by the very Breath of God. Paul

gives it New Covenant clarity in Romans 8: the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace. Not performance and anxiety. Life and peace.

That is who you were designed to be. That is what God wrote.

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### ***III. The Ash That Buried the Writing***

But the ash came. And we have to be honest about that today.

To those of you who have walked with God for fifty or sixty years: you know this valley. You have buried people. You have watched faith go cold in children you raised in this very church. You carry regrets quietly, certain God must be tired of hearing about them. The bones in the valley are not someone else's. They are yours.

To the young men: you are living inside one of the most distracted generations in American history. A device in your pocket delivers infinite entertainment and zero meaning. Your culture is desperately confused about what a man is and what he is for. And if you are honest, you have spent more hours this week staring at a screen than you have spent in prayer or in service to a single person outside yourself. The ash is real. It just looks different at twenty-two than it does at seventy-two.

Both Mary and Martha said the same thing when they saw Jesus: "Lord, if only you had been here." The small, devastating accusation wrapped inside grief. We do this constantly. We say "thy will be done" and spend the rest of the week managing God's schedule for Him. We name our anxiety "intercession," hoard rather than give, scroll past the suffering rather than enter it. Each of these is a bone on the valley floor.

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### ***IV. The Voice That Reads What the Tomb Cannot Silence***

Here is where Luke Farritor and his X-ray machine run out of road. The Vesuvius Challenge could decode ancient words. It could not raise a man.

Jesus arrives in Bethany four days after the burial. Four days is not a grey area. Martha says it plainly: "Lord, by now there is a stench." And Jesus says:

*"Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"*

He prays. Then He shouts into the sealed dark:

*"Lazarus, come forth!"*

And the dead man walks out.

That Voice spoke light into nothing in Genesis 1. It commanded Ezekiel's bones to rise and stand as a great army. It walked out of a Jerusalem tomb on the third morning wearing glory instead of grave clothes. It has never once been stopped by a stone.

Notice: Jesus wept before He raised. He entered the grief personally, with tears on His face. The cross is the full weight of that entering — every dry bone, every decade of half-hearted faith, every wasted year of youth, every quiet accusation we have ever thrown at heaven. He bore it all in His body. The resurrection was the Father's verdict: Paid. Finished. Raised.

For those of you carrying the weight of old sins you are not sure God has released you from: He has not forgotten them. He has buried them. In His own grave. They are not coming back.

For the young man not sure God would want anything to do with the version of him that actually exists: He wept for you specifically. The Come forth spoken over Lazarus is spoken over you, today, at this altar, in the Absolution, in the bread and the cup placed in your hands. This is My body, given for you. This is My blood, shed for you.

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### ***V. Unbound and Sent***

One detail almost everyone misses: after Lazarus walks out, Jesus turns to the crowd and says, "Unbind him, and let him go." He is alive — but still

wrapped in burial linen. Still wearing his grave clothes. The community is assigned a task: take them off.

To the older saints: you carry authority no one else in this room has. You have watched God work across decades in ways the young cannot yet see. But some of you are still wrapped in the linen of a sin confessed forty years ago that you cannot quite believe was actually forgiven. It was. The Spirit of God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead — Romans 8:11 — lives in you. The young people in this room are watching whether the faith holds under the weight of a full life. Show them it does.

To the young men: Luke Farritor was twenty-one when he read words sealed in ash for two thousand years. He didn't wait to be older. He had a skill, a text, and he went to work. You have something he never had: the living Word of God, the Holy Spirit of the risen Christ, and a world full of people lying in valleys of dry bones, desperately needing a voice worth trusting. Go be one.

When you love the difficult neighbor, tell the costly truth, walk into someone's grief instead of away from it — you are not merely being a good person. You are confirming who you are. You are a son or daughter of the living God, sealed by His Spirit, called to reign with Christ over all creation.

The Herculaneum scrolls were entombed for nineteen centuries. But the words were always in there, waiting for a voice to read them back to life. The Word of God written in you — the image of God, the law of love, the calling of the kingdom — has never been destroyed by the ash. It has only been waiting for the Voice that speaks from outside every tomb.

That Voice has called your name.

Come forth. Stop wearing the grave clothes. You are forgiven. You are raised. You are sent. Amen.

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