

CUT FOR TIME
EXCERPT FROM TODAY'S SERMON

**HEALTHY CONGREGATIONS:
UNBINDING ONE ANOTHER**

Years ago, a real-life pastor spoke about a woman in his congregation named Linda. She had lost her husband suddenly – no warning, no chance to say goodbye.

Soon after, she disappeared from the worshipping community, from friendships, from anything that reminded her of the life she once had.

Finally, after a few months, a few trusted friends reached out to her. But coming back to church was almost too much to bear: Each Sunday, she'd try. But convince herself not to go. It was the *perceived* fear of being shamed by returning. Of facing the people. Of seeing the empty spot next to her. Of being around others who would have acted like the world moved on without her.

So what did a church friend named Ruth do?
Picked Linda up at her home and drove her to church herself. Together, they sat in the back pew.

The pastor knew the truth: She was present, but not yet alive. Her eyes were hollow. Shoulders hunched. She was deflated. She sat through the service like someone holding their breath.

No standing. No singing. No praying.

After worship, she tried to leave quickly, but an older man named Greg gently stopped her on her way

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out the door. Greg simply said, *“I’m really glad to see you today. We don’t need to talk right now, just let me walk you to your car.”*

The next week, Linda came again – on the shoulders of another trusted friend. And again, a young member named Kristina walked her to her car.

Over the next few months, the church – everybody – became her unbinding community:

A man who had also lost a spouse invited her to sit with him during worship so she didn’t have to sit alone. A young couple brought her a meal once a week – not because she asked, but because grief makes even boiling water feel impossible. A retired teacher invited her to join a small group, telling her, *“Just show up and breathe with us.”* An accountant helped her navigate paperwork and finances she had never handled before. A choir member left a card in her mailbox every Friday with a quote from the Bible.

None of these people could have raised her from the dead. Well, maybe *together*, they did.

“Where two are three are gathered together in My name” Maybe we *can* wake the dead!

Certainly, together, they helped Linda come alive again.

One day, years later, Linda told her pastor, *“I think I’m starting to feel like my old self again. Well, maybe not my old self – but a fresh, new self. I didn’t know how to come back to life, but you all helped me remember.”*

It takes a village to raise the dead.

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