

February 1, Epiphany 4A (Matthew 5:1–12)

## In life, death, and resurrection, nothing is lost—no one is lost.

by [Paul Lutter](#) in the [February 2026](#) issue

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We were not surprised to learn that my wife’s uncle died. Buried under years of excessive drinking, he carried complex grief over the death of his wife. To protect his grief, he lashed out at anyone who tried to get close. His words were like weapons. To assuage his pain, he pushed others away. He pushed me away. He pushed everyone away. Those who tried to draw near were targets for his ire.

His life story resonates with the younger son in the story of the prodigal. Only his parents could get close. They would often drop everything and run to wherever he was to bail him out of whatever trouble he found himself in. The pattern they fell into was well worn. No matter the trouble he got into, there was always love on the other side.

When they died a year ago, he spiraled down even more. A court-ordered device was installed in his truck to prevent him from driving drunk. He got around this by taking his dad’s truck instead. Family members worried he would hit and kill someone. He never did, though he did put a hole in his parents’ garage door backing his truck up their driveway. Once, he fell out of his truck outside a bar and spent a cold, northern night sleeping on the ground.

As we drove north for his visitation, we couldn’t imagine there would be many people there. Maybe a few family members. Maybe my father-in-law’s friends would attend. But the experiences we’d had with my wife’s uncle led us to believe that he didn’t have friends. He had spent his career literally building bridges; ironically, he spent his life metaphorically burning them. As our daughter slept in the back of our car, my wife prepared a powerful sermon she would share with whomever might attend the gathering, a sermon that came down to a message of a love that’s stronger than death.

There were more vehicles in the funeral home parking lot than we expected. When we walked in, we saw many familiar faces, people we know and love. The talk that filled the room had a familiar, hushed tone. Our young daughter was curious to understand the process of death and burial. Other than that, the mood in the room was something like, *We knew this was coming*.

In the corner of the room, sitting on a couch, were several women and a young boy we didn’t recognize. They didn’t tell us how they knew my wife’s uncle, but we did learn that he had attended a baby shower for the child sitting on his mother’s lap. He even played the baby shower games.

Later, my wife and one of her brothers stood by the urn that held their uncle’s remains. Her brother said that though their uncle had issues, he would remember the good in him. My wife gave her sermon. Her dad told a story from a time when he and his brother had been on better terms. Laughter and breath filled the room. I wondered whether anyone else would say anything—and what they would say.

Eventually a man stood up and came to the podium. He was short and balding, and his cheeks were the red that comes from being in the cold too long. He said how much he admired my wife’s uncle, how he had helped him by sharing his experiences and struggles. I wondered, *How did they know each other?*

When he sat, another person stood up and talked about their similar experience with my wife's uncle. And then another person spoke, and another and another.

They had been in a recovery group together. No one in the family had realized this.

At a family dinner later that night, we talked about the stories that came from people in recovery. Some were heartened by what they heard. Others were skeptical, saying that these positive stories were the result of a master manipulator.

We were right, and we were not. What was revealed was that in life, death, and resurrection, nothing is lost—no one is lost. We may not see it, believe it, or know it. Yet underneath what we think we know and see is a deeper reality. We are ever seen and known as we are. And, even so, we are blessed; we are wildly beloved.