

Third Sunday of Easter  
6 April 2008, RCL, Year A  
St. Margaret's Church  
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To the Honor and Glory of God

Freedom in Christ

“You have freed me from my bonds.” Psalm 116.14

On Easter I said that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is too big of a thing to be contained. It cannot be contained in one application. It cannot be held by one theological category. It cannot be fully explored in one sermon. It has no single application or meaning. The resurrection has something to do with everything.

One of the implications of Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead is that we are going to live forever. Jesus gives us eternal life through the power of his own life. We may not necessarily understand all the mechanics of how that works, but my sense is that we generally believe that to be true.

We doubt from time to time. We wonder occasionally how it might be, but by and large we accept that we have eternal life through Jesus. I would even be so bold as to say that, depending on their religion, non-church people have some belief in the resurrection and eternal life as well.

Eternal life is only one implication of the resurrection. I have been thinking a lot this week about Martin Luther King, Jr., as we remembered the fortieth anniversary of his assassination this past week. Martin called us to live into the freedom God gave us. His cry for freedom was rooted in God's liberation.

The power of Jesus' life frees us. His life frees us from death, and it frees us from a lot of other bonds as well. We are free through Jesus' life. Realizing that and living into that freedom might be harder than accepting the gift of eternal life.

In Psalm 116, verse 2, the psalmist says that “the cords of death entangled” him. Whatever death dealing thing it was that he was facing, he likens it to some form of bondage.

Then, later in the psalm, after describing God's rescue, he declares in verse 14, “you have freed me from my bonds.” God loosed the shackles that held him in bondage.

The experience the psalmist describes here in Psalm 116 is found in other psalms as well, and in various places in the Christian spiritual tradition. It is that experience of being tied, bound, trapped, or enslaved. God comes into our lives and frees us in one of two ways. The first is that God removes the person, place, or thing that binds us. The second is that God removes the chains, or, in other words, the power over us.

This may all seem pretty abstract, so let's get down to it. What holds you in bondage? What is it that has a grip on your mind, body, soul, or heart and just won't let go? Whatever it is, the message of Easter is, "You are free."

One of the obvious chains that binds us is sin. Let's face it, we all do things that harm ourselves, hurt others, and put strain in our acceptance of God's grace. We all sin, the bible tells us that, but we really don't need the bible to tell us. We know full well from our own experience.

The reason sin is so destructive is that it takes hold of us – it binds us, enslaves us. Let's take the sin of judging others. It is that attitude toward others that is critical, suspicious, and condescending. Often it is committed from the perch of self-righteousness, looking down on others. I choose this sin as an example because it is probably the most prominent one among people in church.

A judgmental heart and mind enslaves the one who practices it. It enslaves us because it limits our ability to see the good in others and the good in ourselves. When we judge others, we paint them all one color, and usually without mercy. It binds us from true relationship with one another. It robs us of the peace in our hearts that God seeks to give us.

Judgment is just one example. All sin works in a similar way. They all bind us.

Sin enslaves us. Jesus frees us. The incarnation and resurrection offer us spiritual power to overcome the grip of sin in our lives. The temptation toward sin may not be removed in this life, but the power to resist it is available to us. We do not have to engage in those sins that entice us, as irresistible as they may seem. We are free in Christ.

Another form of bondage is addiction. Addiction encompasses a lot more behaviors than just drugs and alcohol. We live in an addicted society. We can become addicted to food and relationships, success and money, sugar and caffeine, sex and power. Addiction is not about the thing we want, but about our uncontrollable impulse to have it. That is the bondage. Alcohol and food are not chains wrapped around our bodies. The chains are inside of us: in our hearts and minds.

God frees us from those bonds. There is no addiction for which there is not a spiritual solution. One could argue that addictive behaviors are rooted in our search for God. Filling our lives with God pushes out the need for other things. The life giving power of God empowers our freedom.

Another form of bondage is actually bondage. There are people in this country, in this community, and all around the world who are bound by the desires of other people. This type of enslavement happens along lines of race, gender, and economic status. It follows the fault line of sexuality and political status. There are lots of forms of social and psychological oppression in our world.

Even such stark chains are torn asunder by the life giving power of God. That freedom comes in a least two forms. One is the spiritual power to resist believing what others say about you. God gives us our sense of self, not other people, or things. We are children of God, and with that self-understanding comes a power that will overcome any form of psychological and spiritual bondage.

The other way freedom comes to us in those situation is through the overthrow of the oppression. The story of freedom in our world is as much a positive experience of liberty as it is the destruction of those things that would enslave us.

Racism is a powerful slave-owner. It holds in bondage the minds and hearts of millions. For the world to be free of racism, racism must be destroyed. The life-giving power of God strengthens us to fight for the freedom given to us in Christ. It is a spiritual battle.

Poverty binds millions around the world. God frees the poor spiritually. God gives them the spiritual resources they need to face each day. Nevertheless, there is another form of freedom – the freedom of having food to eat, medical care when you are sick, and the power to change your situation. God gives that too, and God will probably use us to roll the stone away and bring forth freedom for the poor.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead frees us from all our bondage. We are free from death, sin, destructive behaviors, and ignorance. We are also free to fight against those who would enslave us. What should be our response to such freedom? Live. Live into the life God gives us. Live into the fullness of the resurrection. Live as the free persons that you are.