

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Rev. Jason S. Glombicki

October 25, 2020

Hear Jesus's words again: "The truth of the matter is, everyone who lives in sin is the slave of sin" (John 8:34). Perhaps it's not the best way to welcome our guests and past members on Homecoming Sunday, but those aren't my words, they're Jesus's words! And, I think this translation of Jesus's words are most accurate. You see, in this sentence, every time Jesus says the word translated as "sin" there is a definite article directly before the word "sin." The definite article translated here would be "the"—so, from the Greek, it literally says "the sin." And this makes a world of difference in how we translate Jesus's words.

You see, oftentimes we think of sin as an action. Like, being filled with hate, stealing something, breaking the law, or *doing* something wrong. And that's an act resulting *from* sin, but "sin," or in this case, "the sin" is so much more than that. In fact, many theologians have drawn from the Scriptures an understanding of sin that is less of an action and more of a way of being. We find it in Apostle Paul's writings, and we hear it spoken about by Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, Karl Barth, and now, me. (I know, that was bold to

add myself to that list.) But “the sin” is about this natural tendency to live an “inward” life, that is, to make everything about me, myself, and I. Living in sin is being steeped in ego, selfishness, and scarcity. It’s a state that can lead to an act, but “the sin” is an existence into which we are born, bread, and bound.

And that’s where Jesus brings in this analogy of slavery to illustrate the evil of both slavery and “the sin” we all live among. You see, Dr. Alicia Myers reminds us that in Jesus’ time, “slaves were to seek only those things their master desired.”¹ The master’s wishes became the slaves’ wishes. So too, “the sin” binds us to the desires of “the sin.” In other words, whether we like it or not, we are bound to the system in which we operate. And, on Reformation Sunday, it’s fitting that we hear this today, because this was a critical element in the Reformation. In fact, it is one of Luther’s main arguments in “The Bondage of the Will.” In this work, Luther argued that our will is *not* free; instead, it is bound to sin, bound to selfishness, bound to the ego.

¹ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4618

We live in a society that, whether we like it or not, is built on, or at least deeply shaped by, individualism, even, “rugged individualism.” It’s shaped by ideals that we can do it alone and we can do whatever we want. It’s a place where *I* can choose to not wear a mask (that’s the inward life), where *my* career advancement is primary (again, the inward life), and where amassing and holding onto food, money, and resources is the only way *I* can get ahead. This is the textbook “inward life” or “the sin.” And if those are the ideals we live among, we are taught, and that we operate within, then we become bound to the desires of these ideals. After all, Jesus said, “everyone who lives in sin is slave to sin” (John 8:34). Well, happy Homecoming Sunday!

But, Jesus also said, “if you live according to my teaching, you really are my disciples then you’ll know the truth, and the truth will set you free....if the heir—the Only Begotten—makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:31-32,36). So, in the midst of talking about a bondage to “the sin,” Jesus speaks of freedom. Jesus offers freedom from captivity to the desires of this world. Freedom from our selfish tendencies. Freedom from an inward life. Instead, Jesus offers an outward life. That is, a life lived for God and for others. But instead of just slick marketing and a bunch of cheap talk about “freedom,” Jesus embodied it.

You see, from the first chapter of John's gospel, we discovered that Jesus took on human flesh to embody an outward life. And, while *WE* are oh, so stuck in systems of oppression constructed around an inward life, Jesus liberated us from this system and gave us an example on how to break free. Through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, Jesus modeled freedom.

For, God loves us so much that God freed us from the rat race of ego, God freed us from the ghoulish tricks and the lies of scarcity, and God freed us from half-baked truths and bogus beliefs. Instead, God offers us the opportunity to follow Jesus's teachings, like the self-giving love shown when Jesus washed the disciples' feet (John 13). Now some of us might think touching another's piggies is pure torture, but we can act in self-giving love as we hand over part of our ego, our wealth, and our selfishness. And, the thing is, from a perspective of "the sin" this action of embodying the characteristics of Jesus will feel like hurt, but in God's reality, it's more like a sore muscle. As we work on that freedom muscle, we might embody self-giving love by tithing to the church to feed the hungry, cloth the naked, and walk with those in despair. As we stretch our freedom muscles, perhaps we'll embody Jesus's radical generosity (John 2) as we create space for the

voices and experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. As we bulk up our freedom muscles then maybe we will recognize how God has abundantly provided for us— an abundance of food, an abundance of love, and an abundance of gifts. Then, as our freedom muscles get stronger, we might partner with God to catch glimpses of God’s outward life—a life of freedom that Jesus gives.

Friends, in our baptism, we were called to this is divine workout. And the meal at Christ’s table is our nutrition program. These are God’s free gifts of love and grace. Then, empowered by these gifts, we can respond to this time of pandemics, protests, and pervasive politics. Friends, we, as the church, are living within the next great reformation. A reformation where our freedom muscles become key, a reformation that will, once again, ask us to strip away religious habits that no longer strengthen the muscles of grace and love. We are living in a time where God’s church is being reformed and so too, you are being reformed with God’s abundant love and grace. Thanks be to God for this never-ending reformation. Amen.