

It can be said as you look through the scriptures that the Israelites always have a way of forgetting where they had been and what they had done. In our Old Testament lesson last week the Israelites mourned the fact that they were no longer in good old Egypt. Oh, the fish, the melon, the leeks and the garlic. How they missed the good old days in Egypt. Had they forgotten the whips, the harsh labor, the way they cried out to God at night for deliverance? Apparently so! In our gospel reading for the day, the Israelites have another lapse of memory. Jesus tells the Israelites who have gathered around, that if they abide in him that they can be truly free. The Israelites turn off their memory and say, "What do you mean make us free? We have always been free."

What a selective memory indeed! How about 200 years enslaved in Egypt? How about 70 years in Babylon? How about their current situation? For the Israelites to call themselves free at Jesus time is a joke. Nearly every action they want to do must be okayed by the ruling Romans. But yet they stand before Jesus and declare that they have never been slaves to anyone...so they sure don't need to be freed.

How ridiculous it seems that the Israelites would say such a thing. Why don't they just admit that they have been slaves? But as I was thinking about the sermon this week, I wondered about us. Have we ever been slaves? If so, would we admit it?

If there has ever been one nation that can rival the Israelites on their insistence of being free people it is ours. Even the mention of slavery in this country brings only bad memories. As Americans we claim to be free in every way, and even have become the protectors of freedom around the world. So maybe for us today it is just as hard for us to think of ourselves as slaves as it was for those Israelites gathered around Jesus.

But yet Jesus says to you today, "You were once a slave." Why? Because, everyone who is sinning is a slave to sin. Without Jesus we are slaves: slaves to sin, slaves to death, slaves to Satan. The chains are on our hands and our feet. We are not free at all.

The problem with truly grasping what it means to be a slave is that for most of us gathered here is that we truly can't remember ever being without Jesus. For most of us, we were baptized long before we even began to record events into our memory. In every real sense we can not remember ever being without Jesus and his forgiveness, of being slaves to sin.

The danger for us though is when we go from not being able to remember that time, to not taking serious that it did happen. If we want to fully appreciate what it means to be free, we must first fully realize that at one time, whether we remember it or not, we were slaves. Not sort of slaves, but completely slaves.

We know from the bible that each and every one of us was conceived in sin! From day one of our existence, we were slaves to sin. So no one is exempt. Even if you have been to church ever Sunday since you were born, you still were born a slave. Perhaps some of you the realization that you were a slave is not so hard to make. Some of you who did not grow up in the church remember being with out Jesus quite well. You know the freedom you lacked without his peace. Others of you might have fallen away from Jesus for a while, jumped back into the slavery of sin. But now again you are free. Well whatever the case, we must all know that we share one thing in common: we were all slaves.

It is easy for those of us in the church to forget the slavery we were rescued from some time ago. And when we do, some of our actions are reminiscent of the words those Israelites spoke. What do you mean make us free? We have always been free. But we haven't and today we must confess that truth fully.

If I stopped my sermon here today you would have a good feeling of how many people at the time of the reformation felt. They were reminded time and time again that they were slaves. Placed before them were all sorts of ways that they could try to get free. They could do more good works! They could buy an indulgence for their sins! They could have an extra mass said for them by a priest. But the problem was that all of these ways given to the people to escape slavery offered no real freedom at all. Each method only directed people back to their own efforts to try to get free. And the haunting truth that many of the people lived with was this, "If you try to set yourself free, you are slaves indeed." As our sermon hymn reminded, "good works can not avert our doom, they help and save us never." The people of Luther's time knew they were slaves, they just didn't know how to get free.

But the good news that Luther reminded the world some 500 hundred years ago is this, "If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed." There is no question as to the fact that we are born into slavery. The question is how we get free. The answer that our sermon hymn gives is this, "Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone, he did for all the world atone, he is our one redeemer." Yes Jesus removed us out of our state of slavery. And how did he

do that? He took our slavery upon himself. He took the chains from our hands and feet and bound himself to the cross with them. There he experienced true slavery for us. There he became a slave in order that we might become free. But that was not the end of the story. In a feat that no Houdini or modern day magician will ever replicate, he broke the bonds of death. He left the chains behind in the tomb and walked out free indeed. And that freedom he demonstrated on Easter morning he shared with us on the day of our Baptism.

I suppose Jesus could have just freed us from slavery and set us on our way. But he didn't. He wanted us to be more than just freed slaves. He wanted us as his sons and daughters. On the day of our baptism, he adopted us by placing his name upon us. And as Jesus reminds us today, as sons and daughters we are blessed to remain in his house forever. As long as we live, we are blessed to gather here in this house to hear his Word and to feast at his Table. And when our time in this earthly house is finished, we will go to the mansion prepared for us in heaven. Indeed, we will remain in the house of the Lord forever. We will rejoice in the freedom Jesus won for us forever. We will continue to sing the Te Deum we sang last week here on earth there also in heaven with all the saints and angels. That is freedom indeed.

This week I was able to speak with the man who designed the artwork on the front cover of our bulletin. The artwork which pictures the same girl both as enslaved and yet at the same time free to skip ropes gladly was his way of questioning what true freedom was. Is the girl on the cover free or not? Thanks be to Jesus, that our freedom is never in question. If our freedom was up to us, we would never be sure of it, but we know this truth: If the son sets you free, you are free indeed. Amen.