

FREEDOM FROM SIN

Series: Trails to Freedom
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Forgiven, Lent,
Mark 2:1-13

So we are in the season of Lent. A period of 6 weeks or 40 days leading up to Easter. You do not hear about this a lot in some streams of the church and that's okay. Here at Trinity we do observe lent. We join with the entire body of Christ in setting a time in our year to invite believers to slow down, reflect on the death and resurrection of Jesus and repent by returning our hearts back to God.

This season as a church we will be looking at the trail Jesus left us to our freedom. As he lived his life obediently towards the cross he left a trail of freedom, a freedom that made us sons and daughters of God.

We finished off last week's conversation with the story of the baptism of Jesus. Especially taking note that God was fully pleased in Jesus because he was his son. He had not done anything yet and did not have to do anything for the father to be pleased.

Jesus had just appeared on the scene as a 30-year-old, son of a carpenter named Joseph. No healings yet, no teaching in authority yet. God was pleased with Him because he was his son.

Then, he leads his life towards the cross which is what we will be celebrating at Easter and by doing so he made those how to believe in him, sons and daughters of God.

So God sees us, the same way he sees Jesus. You do not have to have healed yet or been a preacher. You do not have to have achieved anything of mention. God is already pleased with you. Precisely because you are his child. That is some great news

The price paid for your freedom and my freedom is way too great. Your freedom has been paid for. And on today's trail, we find freedom from sin.

Let's pray

Soon as Jesus was baptised the Holy Spirit led him to the wilderness to be tempted. Sin is what happens when we listen to the voice of our appetites and try to live outside of what God would want.

And our appetites are good and created by God but sin distorted them. Most temptation is not always from a very dark place. It is often something good and beautiful and the enemy and culture mixes in half-truths and distortions of the truth. Our appetites for sex, food, acknowledgement, success, name them. All these are good things and they are often the areas of temptation.

If you look at the things Jesus was tempted with, they were good things right at the heart of human desire and appetites. Turn a stone into bread; appetite for food. Worship the devil and get all Kingdoms given to him after all isn't he the rightful King? That is pulling on our

appetite for power. Why go through death if he can get what is his anyway just by a bow? Jump down from a peak and everyone immediately notices he is a lot more than they thought and they start paying attention. Maybe the appetite for recognition.

And most of the temptation of Jesus, the enemy attacked his identity. He said, “if you really are the son of God then do this.” Jesus was led into the wilderness right after his baptism. At his baptism, God confirmed his identity as his beloved son. And right after that the enemy starts trying to make him question that.

I think oftentimes we easily give in to temptation because we forget the promises the father has made to us as his children. We fail to trust that he will keep them. For some reason, whether it is exhaustion, patterns or bad boundaries we forget our identity and live like we were not children of God and have to fend for ourselves. This was the case with the temptations of Jesus too. He is coming from a high point where God has just confirmed his identity not just to him but to everyone around him and what does the enemy say to him?

“If you are the son of God?” And some of you have heard that voice over and over again saying, “Are you really God’s child” and because of our cultures, it translates to voices like, “Are you really a Christian? Are you really going to heaven? Do you really have faith?” I think those forms of the question are so unhealthy but the point is it is the enemy making us question our identity.

Do not be surprised if right after a great time with God and after receiving promises and a vision from God that your greatest temptation will start with the questioning of everything God has just promised you. Do not be surprised if you have more difficult experiences right after a great time of worship and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on you.

And Jesus rose above the temptation. I do not think this is the only time he was tempted. He was human just like us. Paul says he was tempted in every way, yet without sin. And every time Jesus rose above temptation. And because of being without sin, he was worthy to pay for our sins and bring us forgiveness.

Let's look at this story

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. 2 They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. 3 Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

8 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? 9 Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk?’ 10 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, 11 “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” 12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

Jesus drops the mic, I feel it says in that last line but politely. Here is the thing, someone does everything they needed to do to be brought before Jesus. He looks at him and realises that more than anything else, he needed forgiveness.

Mark 2:1-12

I think more than anything else the human soul suffers from a sense of loss of connection. Some people call it being disconnected from the universe, some think it is just disconnection from themselves, some think it is just disconnection from each other. All of this is disconnection from God. Above everything else, we think we, we need forgiveness. This is the freedom that Jesus came to offer us.

So this day someone comes in very sick and if you asked anyone, what he really needed was to be made well. But Jesus starts with offering him forgiveness first instead. One of the worst prisons be held in is a place of being unforgiven. No freedom. You walk in crowds and you can feel totally alone. You look at people’s faces and you almost think they know you and the unforgivable things about you.

When one is a child there is just joy to life without any weight on the soul but as you grow up you meet yourself and others and there is the point where you lose your innocence. You come face to face with the wretchedness of humanity and our need for forgiveness. It’s almost like a dark cloud that just comes over someone as you realize you and all humanity needs forgiveness.

And some people are often stuck in a place where they think God could possibly forgive everyone else but them. What if God really knows what they have done, and what they have said and what they promised to do and did not do that God would never forgive them. Some people walk in the church and think, “wow look at all those disciplined people that God as forgiven, I wish I could be them.”

And you know as Jesus forgave the paralytic in this story some in the crowd started questioning Jesus’ authority to do that.

Interesting how we are always the judge of who should be forgiven or is forgivable. When it’s people we like or they have done things we excuse in ourselves, we celebrate when they are given such news of forgiveness. But maybe these guys knew the paralytic before his condition. Maybe they knew all he had done. It was a small town anyway.

They maybe knew he was not good enough, maybe he was the town's most wanted thief, or the village drunk. Maybe he had sexually assaulted someone or was an arrogant atheist convincing young people away from the faith, maybe he supported the wrong political party. They probably even thought that his paralysis was a punishment for his sins.

And in this culture people viewed disease as a punishment from God. So they thought, of course, he is under God's anger.

Maybe they knew him too well and thought he did not deserve forgiveness so how dare Jesus claim that his sins are forgiven? After all, who does Jesus think he is to claim to forgive sins? Only God can do that.

So Jesus offers forgiveness as he realised that this man was in anguish in his soul more than in his body. A deep need for forgiveness. But he goes further and heals him. Mic Drop. Takes away his burdening of the soul and the stigma that people would have used to remind him of his sin.

Have you ever needed forgiveness and been told by the person you had hurt that they have forgiven you? It is like rainwater washing over your heart. You feel clean and it is unbelievable. I remember hearing the words I forgive you from someone I had really hurt. That just broke me and I cried for a while.

This is what Jesus is doing. He knows the authority he has with the community as a Rabbi and he is publicly declaring that this guy is forgiven. And he follows it with healing to silence the naysayer. Mic Drop.

Even today, some of you walk in here and people know you. They know all your stories.

They know of your failed marriage and relationships, they know of your abortion, they know why you moved from the other town. They know of everything you carry around like a prison sentence for yourself. They know why you keep thinking everybody else is forgivable but me. And some of them agree with you. Jesus does not just want you to receive forgiveness but also heal the wounds caused by sin in you.

One of the places Jesus came to lead us to in freedom is a place of forgiveness. I love this song by a band called Tenth Avenue North that sings about God's love and how he is always with us. It has the line that says He was there even when we were hungry and were tempted to steal. And in the story we read, Jesus goes ahead and shows that God is not only wanting to be around when we are hungry and are tempted to steal but also forgives us for when we actually give in and steal.

Jesus is leaving a trail to the cross, a trail to our freedom, a trail to us being sons and daughter's of God, the trail to the cross.

But why would God care? Would it really bother God that much that we need forgiveness? Would he really pay any price? And if God hates sin, why even get involved with us, to begin with? Precisely because we are his children.

Some time back a family member got mixed up with something he shouldn't have. You know no one ever thinks anything will go bad until it does. We are always saying it is not such a big deal, I will stop tomorrow, this is the last time until we actually find ourselves where that path was leading us all along.

So I got a call in the middle of the night from his disappointed father that he had been arrested. It was this weird place because at some level it is out of hands. At some level, it is annoying and disappointing. Shouldn't they have known better? Shouldn't they have acted better?

Guess where his father was all that time? Right outside the prison doors. A heartbroken father calling family while in pain and even maybe angry but he is right outside still fighting for his son. Negotiating with the injured party to settle out of court.

Obviously, that means money. A ransom has to be paid. The same father starts calling both immediate and extended family trying to raise money to free his son. There is nothing a father will not do to free their child from bondage.

This is not particularly a strange story. Some of you know how much your parents have gone through to bail you out because you kept getting into trouble. Some of you are bailing your kids out. And you get angry and upset and disappointed and you stomp your feet and you stop talking to them yet you sit right outside their prison doors and fight for their freedom.

That is just a glimpse of what God did for our freedom. He hates sin. We should have known better. We should have acted better. He warned us. We read the word and he had warned us. He used our parents to warn us, he used the pastor to warn us. Still, we did not listen. Instead of walking away, he is the one sitting outside our prison doors. Negotiated our freedom and paid the highest price for our forgiveness.

So it matters that Jesus speaks to us today that you are forgiven. And some of you have never accepted Jesus into your life because you think that you could never be forgiven, your father has been outside your prison cells and paid the ransom.

And church it matters to be part of the community to hear people say the words "you are forgiven" over us. Because sometimes we just need to hear those words.

When I received the call, I retorted, "Why should we get involved? What assures us that bailing him out, they will not go back to do the same things? What makes us sure they will change and not take advantage of our compassion?"

I did not realize I was being the Pharisees in Jesus' story. Who kept on saying that Jesus did not have the power to forgive and especially not this man. I did not understand the heart of a hurting father who would sit outside prison cells and cry for a son's freedom.

It was not until a few weeks later, I was in deep trouble of my own making. In the middle of the night with no sleep, I fell on my knees and asked God to bail me out. It is then I realized how much people in prison are longing to hear that they are forgiven. No one is in trouble and so proud of what a mess they have made.

Jesus in this story leads us on the trail to freedom by giving us forgiveness. I invite us even as a church to see his children around us and speak to them the words of forgiveness.

As we slow down this third week of Lent, reflect on the forgiveness Jesus has offered you. Will you accept it? Will you let him bring your soul back to life by giving you something you could not have found for yourself?

Who in your life is burdened in their soul as they long to hear the words, “You have forgiven them? Would you consider giving them a call this week?

Who around you is the Holy Spirit showing you their struggle with whether God could forgive them? They think they have done the unforgivable. Could you be Jesus’ hands and feet this week and tell them their sins are forgiven?

Let’s pray