

SERMON: "JOYFUL FOR ... FREEDOM"

TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT EXODUS 12:33-42
NEW TESTAMENT MARK 2:1-12

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INTRODUCTION

Putting this series of sermons together about being joyful ... So much so that no one can take our joy from us. Its roots are too deep.

And naming the things we might be joyful for, it just seemed natural to talk about freedom on this Fourth of July weekend
Thankful for, joyful for our freedom

Let's then put a finer point on what we mean by freedom and how we talk about freedom theologically – what it is, where it comes from, what it does for us and what it calls forth from us
Two ways the bible talks about freedom, one highlighted in each of our scripture lessons. From Exodus - liberation and from Mark - forgiveness

These two are both/and, not either/or.

I want you to think about freedom both ways

Like how we use the word "you" both as you, singular and as you, plural. Freedom is that way, both singular and plural
Liberation is the plural. Forgiveness is the singular.

Let's go in chronological order and begin with the Old Testament passage

This is freedom – you, plural. This is the story of liberating a people

It is not just a few verses here or there. It is an entire book

It is the story that serves as the foundation of God's relationship with a particular people, how God identifies God's self

Think how often God says, like to begin the Ten Commandments

"I am the God who brought you up out of the house of bondage"

The passage we selected chronicles what happened right after the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn of the Egyptians. Pharaoh finally relents and lets the people of Israel go. This is when an enslaved people are actually freed

The Egyptians urged the people to hasten their departure from the land, for they said, "We shall all be dead." So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls wrapped up in their cloaks on their shoulders. The Israelites had acted according to the word of Moses; they had asked the Egyptians for jewelry of silver and gold and for clothing, and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. And so they plundered the Egyptians.

LIBERATION

Liberation happened in a hurry. They took their dough before it was leavened
No waiting around when freedom comes to a people hungering for it, praying for it,
waiting for it (four hundred plus years). That point is repeated as we keep reading.

The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides little ones. A mixed crowd also went up with them and livestock in great numbers, both flocks and herds. They baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt; it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

You also may have noticed that the freed people did not leave empty-handed
They asked the Egyptians, the slave owners, for silver, gold and clothing
which the Egyptians gave to them. This was God's plan. Reparations?
Freedom with some resources to start a new life. Forty acres and a mule

General, then President, Grant tried to make that promise of freedom with a
chance for a new life (forty acres and mule) a reality through reconstruction.
It never happened. The freedoms granted after the Civil War through the 13th
14th and 15th amendments were soon after challenged through legislation
and through mob violence. Freedoms won. Freedoms taken away

That is a pattern we see repeated throughout our history. It is happening now
Ten years ago gay marriage became legal. In the last few years we've seen
bathroom bills become law, court rulings allowing discrimination against
LGBTQ people on religious grounds. Freedoms won. Freedoms taken away

Where is God in all of this? Some have argued that God is on the side
of the ones standing up for their views on human sexuality that the moral thing
to do is to discriminate. I disagree! Discrimination is not a Christian virtue.
Our God is a God who frees enslaved people (and gives them a chance
to begin that freedom with some version of forty acres and a mule)

I love how we are first introduced to this idea of liberation in Exodus, chapter 3
This is the story of God calling Moses from a burning bush

Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey ... The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. Now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

NO HOLDING IT BACK

These few verses tell us so very much about God

God observed the misery of his people, an enslaved people

God heard their cries on account of their taskmasters

God knew their sufferings ... and came down to deliver them

That is who God is ... and what God does. Liberation.

How many people have read this story and thought, "God could do this for us too"

How many oppressed and enslaved people have found hope in the story of exodus?

I've done my history homework. I've read many accounts of slave owners

trying to manage the faith of the slaves. They can read the bible. They can have preachers and worship services, but no sermons on Exodus.

They even printed bibles without this book, without Exodus

What does it mean to you that ours is a liberating God? Let me try that question

this way, fit it into a sermon on being joyful for our freedom? Can we be joyful not only for your own freedoms ... but for the freedom of others as well?

God freed the people from slavery. Jesus not only reached out to the people who were overlooked and oppressed, he even lifted them up as examples of faithfulness, going so far as to talk about a 'Good Samaritan'

You good with that? God the Father and the Son being so loosey goosy with their love, with the gift of freedom ... including to those people?

I'm rather OCD myself. Everything in its place and a place for everything

My closet, sock drawer and even my junk drawer are organized

That is how I am wired ... except when it comes to my theology and its impact on my worldview, including my politics

Everything in its place is okay. But every one in their place? Not so much

Freedom doesn't behave when we try to fence it in. It spreads

My theology won't let me dam it up or hold it back. Freedom comes from God, a God of liberation. Who am I to be stingy with it?

The same can be said of the other way we think and talk about freedom

Freedom is liberation, liberation for you plural, for us and for them

Freedom is also forgiveness (freedom from our captivity to sin)

That too comes from God, flowing from God's extravagant mercy

And it too cannot be held back

Our New Testament lesson shows us Jesus talking about forgiveness

and the religious leaders getting upset with him for doing so

Were they trying to hold him back, hold mercy back?

The crowd was probably surprised to see the roof give way and a stretcher

let down from the roof, but not too surprised. Word was out about

Jesus' healing power and his willingness to use it.

SUMMARY

No, the real surprise came not from the hole in the roof
but from Jesus' own mouth. Jesus' first words to the man were,
"Child, your sins are forgiven!"

We know from the fullness of Jesus' ministry, especially his death on a cross,
and from Paul's witness to Christ through his letters ... that Jesus came to
forgive us, to show us God's mercy. But this is the first people hear about it
It is shocking. Does this teacher have the authority to forgive?

**Now some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts,
"Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive
sins but God alone?" At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were
discussing these questions among themselves, and he said to them, "Why
do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier: to say to the
paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat
and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on
earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— "I say to you, stand up,
take your mat, and go to your home."**

Jesus answers them by doing both – healing the man inside and out,
including forgiveness. He says so out loud. Good to hear it, "your sins are forgiven."

We keep so much quiet, hidden behind masks so others (we tell ourselves) won't notice
We wrestle with it ourselves – the remorse, the regret and the resentments
the guilt and the grudges, the doubts and the despair. The reality of our sin
can haunt us, can break us even. These things can enslave us

But Jesus sees us inside and out ... and he forgives us, frees us from our sin
It is not an overlooking or a downplaying. It is as honest as honest can be
It is, when you think about, rather shocking ... especially to our systems
Especially our systems that fence everything into its supposed place
Including religious things sticking with just religious things

Again, as I think about and talk about freedom (and give thanks for it)
I have to get out of God's way and realize and even be joyful about
the fact that God's mercy, like God's liberation, regularly overflows its banks
and our levees and our laws and our likes on social media

Freedom doesn't just flow ... It floods!
Frankly, that is the kind of liberation and mercy I need
I'll be thankful for that free-flowing love for you and me, us and them
I'm going to be joyful about my freedom, our freedom ... and their freedom!