

Bondage and Freedom

Thank you for letting me share some insights from God's word today. May the Holy Spirit help me to rightly divide the word of truth that it might be relevant in our daily lives. Please be seated. As lay preachers, we are given a calendar to request the available dates for preaching. I usually look at what scriptures are in the lectionary readings and that influences my choices. As I looked at the readings for today, I could not recall why I chose this date. The last sermon I preached had referenced the Good Samaritan and today's gospel reading again talked about a Samaritan who was the only one of 10 healed who came back and thanked Jesus for his healing. I have heard many sermons talking about how we are to be like the Samaritan who was grateful. However, I wanted to dig deeper and maybe see if there might be a common theme through all the readings today. There have been many times I was unable to see how the readings fit together. As a lector, I have thought the Old Testament and New Testament readings have had way too many hard words

and too much negativity. Whereas the gospel readings were geared to help the one preaching. Please walk with me as we look for the theme of bondage and freedom. We will discover how God always delivered His people from bondage and He will deliver us from our bondages as well. Our Psalm today is recalling when the Israelites were in bondage to the Egyptians in Egypt and recounting how God brought them out of bondage into freedom. According to Exodus 12:40, they lived in a land not their own for 430 years. I'm not so sure all of those years were bondage because they initially went there to be fed during a famine. Our Psalm 66:11 and 12 clearly state bondage and freedom as we listen to the Bible in Basic English translation..."You let us be put in prison; chains were put on our legs. You let men go driving over our heads; we went through fire and through water; but you took us out into a wide place." Freedom!

Moving on to Jeremiah, let's see where the Judean people were at. They were in Babylon, not by choice; they were captive in a land not their own. Jeremiah is often referred

to as the “weeping prophet” because his messages from God usually describe judgement. However, here Jeremiah is letting the people know that they might be in bondage now in Babylon, but God is going to bring them into freedom a land of their own. However, if we look to the next few verses 29:8--10, it is going to be 70 years...not immediate or 2 years as false prophets have proclaimed. That is why Jeremiah tells them to live their lives as if they are going to be there for a long time.

In 2Timothy we see that Paul is literally in chains. He is in prison, locked up with chains vs 9. But that is not the end of the story, he proclaims in the same verse “But the word of God is not chained.” Even though Paul is chained he is free to proclaim God’s word to Timothy.

Now, as we come to today’s gospel reading, we see 10 lepers in bondage. They are ostracized from their communities and are not even allowed to touch or be touched. They are unable to get their need for belonging and human touch to be fulfilled. They are in true bondage to their own bodies. Jesus heals them and by doing so

restores their freedom. Hallelujah! They have gone from bondage to freedom.

How is all of this relevant to us today? I believe we can all relate to being in bondage at some point in our lives.

Congregation input: What kind of bondages do we experience today? (5 minutes)

We may not have been in prison or jail, or we might have been? Have we been or are we in bondage to resentment, bitterness, and unforgiveness? Have we been in or are we in bondage to our jobs? Money? Power? Have we been or are we in bondage to addiction? Have we been or are we in bondage to relationships? We could go on for a long time and not exhaust our list. I was speaking with a friend of mine this week and she said that most, or if not all her bondages are self-induced. That provoked me to think a little deeper asking myself, where do these bondages come from? For me, the core is fear.

How do we get free from these bondages or strongholds in our lives? The Psalms is a great place to start. They show

us how to be vulnerable and real in our expression to God. In today's particular reading and throughout the Psalms, the psalmist reminds the Israelite people of all the times God has delivered them from bondage. Maybe we can remind ourselves of the times God has delivered us and it can bring hope for our current bondage that we find ourselves in. God's time is not our time, but I do not think we will have to wait 400 years or 70 years for our deliverance. We can take some advice from Jeremiah and keep living. In John 10:10 Jesus said "I have come that you might have life and live it to the fullest." Like Jeremiah, Paul did not let his literal bondage stop him from living. He has shown us that God's word is not chained. Let's claim the wonderful promises for ourselves from God's word. And yes, let's remember to thank God for each little deliverance he gives us as the Samaritan that was given his freedom from leprosy. Gratitude makes life much easier to enjoy. How will we let God free us from one of our self-induced bondages this week? Amen