

"Free From Sin and Guilt"

Grace, mercy and peace of God through our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is weird to get old. Most of the time I don't like it but the option is not to get any older but I'm not ready for that just yet. What causes people to get old? My seminary tennis partner is setting right here today. We did okay at tennis. And we had a good time playing tennis. We were young! I'm feeling old today. I was working on some outside plumbing yesterday which included a lot of bending and kneeling. And I'm walking around today...Oh, I didn't know I had that joint! Some of us are in the midst of later years or extended life and others are in the middle years and others quite young.

So here we are on Sunday morning and we are talking about something, when you look at the lessons, took a while for it to emerge for me. An aside, for me my normal process is getting the readings and I look at what kind of themes pop out. And sometimes it comes out quickly and last week, Bam! By Monday, I was ready to go.

This week I read it and read it again and read it again and again and nothing popped. Then finally something passed through my heart. And I had the theme! Jeremiah talking about the whole idea of a yoke that has been broken in the history of God's people around 500 BC. And from Romans, freedom from the power of the law, freedom from all the things that can hold us down. Then Jesus talking about the freedom that we have even when things are going around us that are hurtful and might be called dangerous. And in the midst of that, we are free - most of us believe. We believe it. If someone would say "are you free?". "Oh, yes, I am". Then we would start looking at our behaviors and our lives and say "how free am I, really?"

So, for instance, if we looked at the history of our lives, are you free from those mistakes in your history? Or do you carry them around and bring them out of your back pocket. Oh, yes, that was 1952. That was hurtful. In 1980, did I really do that? We bring up the guilt of our past. You look me in my eye, and say, "I have nothing to feel guilty about." In my head, I going to say, "you are a liar or that is not correct". But the question is not that we haven't done anything that was not good but the question is "are you free from it or are you carrying it around like a shackle?" Dragging it through life. And of course, what it does to us in life – it robs us of joy. Morose all the time and down on yourself. There is no room for joy. There is an old story about Gordon's Knot that goes back years. Gordon's Knot has to do with a town's pledge that the next person who comes into their town becomes their king. So, the next guy into town is a poor guy with a cart and donkey. So, he becomes the king. And to keep him there they tie his cart to a post with a knot unable to be untied. The people tried

over and over to untie it but it was that complicated. Soon Alexander the Great came into town. He looks at the knot and instead of trying to figure it out, he takes out his sword and Bam! The knot was severed. And it wasn't done in a nice intellectual way; it was done in a powerful way. That applies to us when it comes to our relationship with God. If we are going to try to undo the knottiness in ourselves, it isn't going to work, because we will try to come up with another reason or rational instead of believing God. You are free from the power of sin. "I forgive you and you are free from the power of guilt!" And that is something that is not exclusively Lutheran but that is something the Lutheranism has as a foundational chapter. Free from the power of sin and guilt under grace: the center point of our relationship with God. That's something we can hold onto under all circumstances especially when we start feeling guilty.

To be reminded that we are free from the power of sin and death through Jesus Christ is a good place to start and to be able to live in our world. To have the choice about living our lives. Or are we going to carry this as a religious burden. "Are you a Christian?" Yes, I am. I have been carrying this load for generations. I say No, we are free. God is not going to make us do anything. But he opens us up to opportunities to make some choices that are very, very helpful. You and I can also get caught in the burden of how it will work out in the long run. We have all kinds of people who tell us how it will turn out. It doesn't bode well. What's going to kill us? How many years do we have left if the clock continues to run like it has? It is easy for us to get lost in there. So, we forget that our future is secure in the relationship we have with Jesus Christ. God doesn't come close to us and then move away. His commitment to us is eternal and goes on no matter how our world goes.

I should back up here. In preparing my message today and when the last week was so clear and I had it all down. And then today, well I had to show up because something about what I was going to say today was important to one of you today. Something about that freedom you have in Jesus Christ where you have been carrying a burden and tied up and you are still able to receive the gift of God's grace from Jesus Christ. Be free and that allows you to experience joy no matter what situations you go through. Be free. Enjoy what it means to be a people of God even in the midst of trouble.

May the peace of God that passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.