

Sermon for Sunday, February 24, 2019 - "Set Free"

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
February 24, 2019
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

Note: Good Shepherd's service and activities were cancelled today due to severe weather conditions. Pastor Amy provided her sermon text for posting on our web and social media sites.

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Shame on you! What's the matter with you? Why do you think you're better than you are? You're going to get it and you better just take it, better just turn the other cheek to be struck again and accept your lot in life. If someone hurts you don't make a fuss about it, forgive and get over it.

Tragically, our Gospel reading has often been misused to send these types of messages. It's been weaponized to silence abuse victims, to prevent slaves from rebelling, to keep people in line. These messages are totally contrary to the message of scripture. It's hard to even speak them from the pulpit, but we need to name the ways this passage has been misinterpreted and used to shame and enslave so that we can recognize what it is really trying to do.

Throughout the Gospel of Luke, we see that Jesus has come to bring good news to the poor and release to the captives. Jesus has come to set people free. That is what Jesus is seeking to do with these words as well. Jesus wants to free us all from the ways of the world that ensnare and enslave us. Jesus works to break the system of tit for tat, an eye for an eye, keeping score.

Our world traps us in cycles of retribution. When someone hurts you, you get angry, you seek to hurt them somehow- even if just in your heads. You are trapped by thoughts of them and what they've done, and what you wish would happen to them. You replay the hurt, relive the pain, ruminate about it all.

When someone is good to you - well then you better be good to them so you can keep the good thing going. Gotta work the system to your advantage. Do unto to others what they have done to you; that's the way the world works. No, Jesus says, that traps you into just reacting to what others do. You're bound to them as you react, reciprocate, keep score. If you live like that then you aren't free, and other people have too much power over you.

No, Jesus says be shaped by what God does to you. God shows you kindness and mercy always. Let your actions be shaped by that kindness and mercy, not by what other people do. Be merciful and you will experience the great reward of freedom and well-being that is not dependent on your external circumstances.

Don't resist with hatred or you will start to become like your enemy.

Or, as preacher Nadia Bolz-Weber powerfully proclaims, "Maybe retaliation or holding onto anger about the harm done to me doesn't actually combat evil. Maybe it feeds it. Because in the end, if

we're not careful, we can actually absorb the worst of our enemy, and at some level, start to become them. So, what if forgiveness, rather than being a pansy way to say, 'It's okay,' is actually a way of wielding bolt-cutters, and snapping the chains that link us? What if it's saying, 'What you did was so *not* okay, I refuse to be connected to it anymore?' Forgiveness is about being a freedom fighter. And free people are dangerous people.

Free people aren't controlled by the past.

Free people laugh more than others.

Free people see beauty where others do not.

Free people are not easily offended.

Free people are unafraid to speak truth to stupid.

Free people are not chained to resentments. And *that's* worth fighting for."

Jesus wants us to know this freedom, so he gives us the words and the teaching we hear today.

But so often we don't hear these words as freeing - we hear them as things that bring us more shame. Shame on you that you struggle to love, that you struggle to forgive. Shame on you when you feel angry. Shame on you that you're still ruminating about that person and unable to cut the ties to them. We get right back into traps of shame because that's the way our world works. Shame is such a powerful force in our world. Yet, no life-giving change ever comes from a place of shame.

That's why we need more than Jesus' teachings to set us free - why he gives us more than teaching. Jesus comes among us to give us an experience of the freedom and abundance God longs for us to know, to help us taste and experience God's love and mercy.

Jesus comes to live among us so that we might know, deep in our bones, that we are loved and forgiven and honored by God. That there is more than enough love and food and time and honor and well-being to go around. We don't have to live in the ways of the world.

We can be shaped by God and God's ways.

We can treat others the way we want to be treated.

We can live in the ways of love because we are so loved.

We can forgive because we have been forgiven.

Amen.