

Sunday 17th January 2021

Glynde Lutheran Church

Sermon on Mark 1:1 – 8

**Theme: “Freedom is coming, Oh, yes I know” (AT #355)
“Rejoice in your freedom!”**

Introduction:

I really like the song *Freedom is coming*. It is a song that has its roots in the South African situation, where oppressed Christians longed for freedom. And so they sang about it:

**Freedom is coming, freedom is coming,
freedom is coming – oh yes I know (ATOK #355)**

But it's also a song that could have been written by someone who was thinking about our Bible readings for today. For both the Old Testament reading, and our Gospel reading, have this as their central thrust: that freedom is coming.

Part 1: Freedom has come

The Old Testament reading from the prophet Isaiah was originally spoken to the Jewish people who were in captivity in Babylon. The prophet assured them through these words that God was about to rescue them from their captivity and take them back to their homeland. In other words, the prophet was telling the enslaved people of Jerusalem that “freedom is coming”.

Listen again to his words:

A voice cries out,

“Prepare in the wilderness a road for the Lord!

Clear the way in the desert for our God!

Fill every valley; level every mountain.

The hills will become a plain,

and the rough country will be made smooth.

Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed,

and all mankind will see it.

The Lord himself has promised this” (Isaiah 40:3-5).

God is saying through the prophet:

“Look, I am your God. You are my people.

Your time of slavery in Babylon is over. I am about to rescue you from Babylon and lead you back to Jerusalem on a highway. To make this highway, I will cut down mountains and tip them into the valleys to fill them in; I will make rough places into a plain, and the crooked straight. Your journey home will be swift and comfortable”.

An exaggeration, *hyperbole*? Perhaps, but God *did* rescue the people of Israel from their captivity as the prophet said, *though perhaps not in quite such a grand manner as envisioned by the prophet (H. Wendt, Crossways, Unit 31, p. 5).*

Our Gospel reading is also talking about the coming of freedom. Mark in our Gospel reading refers back to God’s deliverance of the Jewish people from Babylon, and talks about John the Baptist as one who is proclaiming the coming of God’s end-time deliverer, *or rescuer*. Mark tells us that John the Baptist said:

“The man who will come after me is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to untie his sandals. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:9-10).

This deliverer from God will carry out the great and final rescue of God’s people. He will rescue them *not from their slavery to a foreign power, but from their slavery to guilt and sin and fear*. He will set them free.

And that’s what Jesus, God’s Son did! He set people free from their slavery to sin and guilt and death by suffering and dying on the cross for them. Jesus said of himself:

The Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve, and to give his life to redeem many people, that is, to set many people free (Mark 10:45).

For us, freedom *has come!!* The Deliverer has come!. Do we, though, *I wonder* really appreciate how great it is to be free! Do we really appreciate how great it is that Jesus, God’s deliverer, has taken on himself the blame and the punishment that we deserve and has set us free. I wonder...!?

Let me tell you a few stories about the coming of freedom. And as I tell them, let’s think about what the freedom *that Jesus has won for us* means to us.

Hear, for example, the words of Mary Barbour, a former negro slave. She was ten years old when her father woke her one night and put her on a wagon that would carry her and her family to their freedom. Listen to the way she speaks:

One of the first things that I remembers was my pappy waking me up in the middle of the night, dressing me in the dark, all the time telling me to keep quiet. One of the twins hollered some, and Pappy put his hand over its mouth to keep it quiet.

After we dressed, he went outside and peeped around for a minute, then he comed back in and got us. We snook out of the house and along the woods path, Pappy toting one of the twins and holding me by the hand and Mammy carrying the other two.

I reckons I will always remember that walk, with the bushes slapping my legs, the wind sighing in the trees, and the whippoorwills hollering at each other from the big trees.

I was half asleep and scared stiff, but in a little while we pass the plum thicket and there am the mules and the wagon. There am the quilt in the bottom of the wagon, and on this they lays we younguns. And Pappy and Mammy gets on board and drives off down the road (*M. Lucado, And the Angels were silent, p. 189*).

She writes: "I will always remember that walk".

The path to freedom is something that a person never forgets, because freedom is something that means a tremendous lot to people.

Or listen to Max Lucado *in one of his devotion books* describe his path to freedom:

A Bible class in a small West Texas town. I don't know what was more remarkable, that a teacher was trying to teach the book of Romans to a group of ten-year-olds or that I remember what he said. The classroom was mid-sized, one of a dozen or so in a small church. My desk has carving on it and gum under it. Twenty or so *other desks* were in the room, though only four or five were taken.

We all sat in at the back, too sophisticated to appear interested. Starched jeans. High-topped tennis shoes. It was summer and the slow-setting sun cast the window in gold. The teacher was an earnest man. I can still see his flattop, his belly bulging from beneath

his coat that he doesn't even try to button. His tie stops midway down his chest. He has a black mole on his forehead, a soft voice, and a kind smile. Though he is hopelessly out of touch with the kids of 1965, he doesn't know it.

His notes are stacked on a podium underneath a heavy black Bible. His back is turned to us and his jacket goes up and down his beltline as he writes on the board. He speaks with genuine passion. He is not a dramatic man, but tonight he is fervent.

God only knows why I heard him that night. His text was Romans chapter six. The black board was littered with long words and diagrams. Somewhere in the process of describing how Jesus went into the tomb and came back out it happened. The jewel of grace was lifted and turned so I could see it from a new angle...and it stole my breath.

I didn't see a moral code. I didn't see a church. I didn't see ten commandments or hellish demons.... I saw my Father enter my dark night, awaken me from my slumber, and gently guide me – no, carry me – to freedom (*Ibid.*, p.190-191).

Max Lucado writes that he always remembers that day: because that was the day that he realised for himself that God had acted to set him free and the day he realised what that freedom meant to him.

What about you? Do you have a day in your memory like that, *the day when you really appreciated from yourself what Jesus had done for you on the cross?* I don't know that I do.

Mine was a gradual growth in understanding: from childhood, through Sunday School, to Confirmation, and Youth, and so on.... Certainly, by the time I went through Confirmation I knew what God had done for me to set me free.... And thereafter it meant everything to me.... Even in the years when I wandered this way and that....

And it was this awareness, and my gratitude to God for setting me free, that eventually led me to Luther Seminary, *Australian Lutheran College*, to study to be a pastor: because I wanted everyone to know how great it is to be set free from guilt and shame and fear....

One more story about freedom. This is the story of a man named Tigyne from the Wallamo tribe whose home is the middle of Ethiopia. In the years prior to World War II, missionaries including a man by the name of Raymond Davis took the good news of Jesus to the tribe. One of the early converts was Tigyne.

Tigyne, though, was still a slave *despite his conversion*. He was a slave to a human master. Let me allow Max Lucado to tell the story, because it is from Max Lucado that I got this story. From where else!? He has been a great source of stories for me over the years. He writes:

Tigyne was a slave. His decision to follow Jesus displeased his master, who refused to allow Tigyne to attend Bible studies or worship. He frequently beat and humiliated Tigyne for his faith. But it was a price which this young Christian was willing to pay.

There was another price, however, he could not afford. He couldn't purchase his freedom. For only twelve dollars his master would release him, but for this slave who'd never known a salary, it might have well have been a million. When the missionaries learned that his freedom could be purchased, they talked it over, pooled some money, and bought his freedom. Tigyne was now free – both spiritually and physically. He never outlived his gratitude to the men who had redeemed him.

Soon after his day of liberty, the missionaries were expelled from Ethiopia. Twenty-four years passed before Raymond Davis returned to Wallamo. During this quarter of a century Tigyne remained a vivid testimony to the power of freedom. He longed to see Davis again.

When he heard that his friend was coming, he went to the mission station several days in a row to wait. Dates on the calendar or time on the clock had no significance for Tigyne so he came daily to search for Davis. Finally, Davis arrived riding in a car driven by a fellow missionary. When Tigyne saw the vehicle come around the corner, he ran to the window and took Davis's hand and began to kiss it again and again. The driver slowed so Tigyne could run beside it. As he ran he yelled to his friends, "Behold! Behold! One of those who redeemed me has returned!"

Finally the car stopped. Davis got out and Tigyne dropped to his knees, put his arms around his friend's legs, and began to kiss his

dusty shoes. Davis reached down to bring him to full height, and they stood with their arms around each other and wept (*Ibid.*, p.192-193).

Three ex-slaves: one freed from man, one freed from sin, and one freed from both. Can you sense the joy of each of these three ex-slaves?

Can you rejoice with them, because you too are an ex-slave? If you have been baptised, and if you are trusting in Jesus as your Saviour, then you *are* an ex-slave. Jesus has set you free from your slavery to guilt, and to self-centredness, and to fear of dying. If you are clinging to Jesus as your Saviour, *you are a free person!!* (*cf. Gal. 5:1*).

That's is why Mark begins his gospel by saying:

This is the good news about Jesus who *is the* Christ, the Son of God (*Mark 1:1*).

The good news is that through Jesus, God's Son, *freedom* has come!!

Part 2: Freedom is coming

But it is not complete freedom yet, is it!?

We still have to battle against our self-centred nature. We still have to endure temptation. We still have put up with suffering, and pain, and grief and death.

But freedom is coming! *Complete and utter freedom* is coming! It will happen when Jesus comes again in glory and ushers in God's new world. Then we will have new bodies, Spirit filled bodies, bodies like Jesus' resurrection body (*Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 15:44-49*). Then we will live with our Lord Jesus in God's new kingdom where love and compassion and care will abound. Then "there will no more death, no more grief or crying or pain" (*Rev. 21:1-7*).

Conclusion:

Yes, as that song puts it:

Freedom, freedom is coming,

Oh yes I know

Oh yes I know

Freedom is coming,

Oh yes I know

Jesus, Jesus is coming,

Oh yes I know

Oh yes I know

Jesus is coming,

Oh yes I know (ATOK #355).