

Sermon, April 26, 2020

1 Peter 1:17-23; Psalm 116:1-4, 12-29

“True Benefits: Ransomed”

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There is no doubt these have been difficult days. I'm reminded of Kubler-Ross's seven stages of grief. I'm sure you've heard of these, denial, anger, and so on, to acceptance. Of course with her model, you come out on the other end, and you are done. With our current situation, I feel like I go through that cycle daily. Frustrated, angry, accepting, in denial. And that was just over breakfast. I got an email the other day from someone in our clergy cluster groups asking, "I'm just wondering how everyone is doing." My response was *it depends on when you ask*.

But deep down, I know we are all going to be Ok. Of that I have no doubt. First, I know that we have a good and mighty God who sits on the throne, who, as we reminded you weeks ago, is the one who holds all things together. And I know that we as human beings have an instinct to survive. That's what we do. We have, over perhaps any other creature, the incredible capacity to adapt to our situations and our surroundings.

Many psychologists believe this is what's behind the condition known as Stockholm Syndrome. Stockholm Syndrome is the condition that people who have been captured or kidnapped develop a fondness for their captors. They develop an affinity for them, in agreement with them. It's so named after a

bank robbery in Stockholm in the early 70's. It resulted in the bank robbers taking hostages. Once the hostages were released, they all refused to testify against the bank robbers. Some of you will remember Patty Hearst, the heiress who was kidnaped and developed the same type of affinity to her kidnappers after a long ordeal.

Why does this happen? Because we are built to adapt and survive. Some will, in an effort to survive physically, mentally, and emotionally, identify with their captives because that's easier to deal with day in day out than to believe you will not survive. We latch onto promises, a bit of kindness, that might come in a harsh environment. We begin to believe these people aren't so bad because that's easier to deal with than to see them as being a threat to us.

Now, let's think about that for a moment. We identify with what holds us captive. Let me say that again, we tend to identify with what holds us captive. Not just people. But ideas, thoughts, and behaviors, as well. Because these things can also hold us captive. We can be kidnapped, ensnared if you will, by more than another human being. And once ensnared, we identify with what holds us captive because it seems to be the only way to survive.

Perhaps that might help us understand why we return to the same destructive behaviors over and over again. We find ourselves falling into the same destructive relationships over and over again, perhaps different people, but essentially the same relationship. We know it hurt us in the past, and we might even hear warning bells go off in our heads, but we ignore them. We try to fill up the empty places in our souls with addictions, with anything that might allow us to be numb for a few hours so we don't have to feel that emptiness. We know it won't end well because it never does, but we can't seem to help ourselves. We live terribly shallow lives, believing that money, acclaim, entertainment, will somehow turn the trick and make sense of our lives. But it doesn't. It leaves us empty like it did before. Look at your own life, look at the things you run to again and again even though they have made you miserable, look at the things you have identified with knowing they will fail you, but you do them anyway.

We keep going back to the same things over and over that make us miserable, but we believe will make us happy. It's like going to a well that's dry and believing this time it will slake our thirst.

One of the good things, if there are any, about what we are going through is that with so many things being taken away from us, we've had the opportunity to ask ourselves what really makes me happy? What really gives my life depth. Let's stop there for a second. That's a really important question. Maybe more than what makes us happy, because we aren't always the best judge of that. But what gives your life depth?

Unfortunately, we often find that we have developed Stockholm Syndrome. We have been captured, kidnapped, from a life of joy and depth. We may have completely forgotten what freedom was like, what it's like to have a life of depth.

This morning, we are beginning a new series called *True Benefits*. What we are going to look at over the next several weeks are what are the benefits of being a disciple, a follower, of Jesus are. Not just a fan of Jesus, but one who actually follows Him.

In our passage of Scripture from 1 Peter, we see one of the first true benefits of being a disciple of Jesus. To be a follower of Jesus is to be a person who has been set free. Peter says in the Scripture today that we were all held hostage. And he specifically talks about the things that we have been held hostage to. Certainly sin, which you would expect. But Peter also mentions being held a slave to the law or the things that we thought would make us happy, would give our lives depth, but failed. And to be a follower of Jesus is to know that your ransom has been paid. Let me say that again, because if there is only one thing you get out of this message, no matter where you are today, I want it to be this. Jesus has paid the ransom. You have been set free. There is no such thing as an enslaved disciple of Jesus. You have been freed from your captivity.

This is why freedom has been at the heart of some of our most beloved hymns in the church. John Newton, former captain of a slave ship, sings of the amazing grace of God that has set us free. Charles Wesley wrote of the amazing love of Jesus who found our long imprisoned spirits, who filled our cells with the flames of His light, my chain fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed thee. I hope you see a theme that when we experience the love of Jesus, when we have been set free from the things that enslave us, the only word we have is Amazing.

You can be free, but only if you want to be. You see, the prison door has been opened, the dungeon is flamed with the light of Christ, your chains are off. But sometimes we lack in that last part, I rose went forth and followed thee. Sometimes we stay put. Free, but still in our cell. We've identified so much with our sin, with our fear, with our actions, with what we just know will work this time, that we can't see the freedom available to us. Freedom can be frightening. The idea of living a life that actually has depth, that turns away from the shallowness of the values around us, can be off putting. It's not easy. We've developed a little bit of a spiritual Stockholm Syndrome.

Wherever you are today, my prayer is that you will realize that the ransom has been paid, and you have been set free. You don't have to be enslaved by the things that have ensnared your life. Fear, rejection, unfulfilled dreams, whatever dry well you have been dipping into, can be left behind.

Jesus doesn't offer you a dry well, but living water that will satisfy your souls in ways you have never imagined. You can have a life of depth, a life of richness, a life of freedom. Today, will you ask Jesus to take your hand and lead you out of your prison? To experience, maybe for the first time in your life, freedom? Will you say yes, will you rise go forth and follow Him? Amen.