

**Sermon, January 8, 2023**  
**Isaiah 42:1-9; Matthew 3:13-17**  
**“Thru the Water: The Promise of Peace”**  
**Rev. Dr. Brian Jones, Senior Pastor**



In 2018, in Thailand, an assistant soccer coach, after a practice took his team into some caves to explore. It was designed to be a fun outing, they were supposed to explore, have lunch in the cave, and then come back out. As you may remember, the story does not end that way. Several hours later, the head soccer coach begins to get calls from worried parents that their children are not back, and no one is answering their phones. Thankfully, one of the boys at practice got picked up early, and he told his parents what the plan of the other boys was.

As the coach and boys were exploring the caves together, heavy rains caused flooding that blocked them from getting out. They were stranded back in the cave with water all around them. A massive diving and

rescue effort began. The water was so dangerous that members of the Thai SEAL teams were brought in to look for the boys. Soon other peoples begin to hear, and countries and individuals, expert divers begin to arrive to helpful if they can. I did a quick count, and I counted over twenty countries involved in the rescue attempt. Pumps are brought in to try to lower the flood waters.

Finally after four days, the boys and coach are found on a ledge about 400 feet wide. But now the bigger problem comes, how do they get them out. Divers bring food to them, water and supplies. It takes several more days to figure out what to do. One of the ideas was to teach the boys basic diving skills and help them swim out. That wasn't going to work. It was proposed they wait until the monsoon season was over and get them out safely. It, too, proved to be bad idea. Finally, one of the pumps pumping water out breaks down, and the water slowly begins to rise again.

The rescuers come up with a bold plan. They send in divers and a medical team. The boys are fitted in diving suits, and then the medical team sedates them until they are unconscious. The divers then, with the medical team, swim them out. They can only remove a few boys at a time.

Finally, 17 days after they enter the cave, the boys are all rescued. It was an incredible multi-national joint effort to recues the boys. But it came at a great price. One of the Navy SEAL divers will die during the rescues. Another will contract a blood infection from the waters and will die 5 months later.

It's an amazing, harrowing story. One that obviously makes the news all over the world, books written and a movie, as well. The fact they were able to get all of these boys from 17 to 11 years old home safely is incredible.

It's an amazing story, but I want you this morning to think of it in a different way. A *what if* scenario, if you will. Can you imagine any scenario where the boys and the coach would have said no? No thank you, we are actually doing ok right where we are. Do you realize what you are putting your families through? Yes, but we are happy right here. In fact, we've been down here for 17 days. We have become used to it. How do we know the world hasn't changed in 17 days? The world moves pretty quickly anymore. Maybe it's not like it was? How do I know I'll be happy up there? No, better safe than sorry.

But you aren't safe, that's the whole point. People lost their lives to save you. Look, it's not that we aren't appreciative. It's just that we have gotten used to where we are, and we have begun to forget what the sun looks like. Why, we have been down here so long we aren't even sure it's possible to be saved. Sounds dangerous. Yes, but it's the only way. No, thank you but no.

Now, of course we can't imagine such a scenario. No one in their right mind would want to stay trapped in a cave in the dark miserable when freedom is at their fingertips. It's such a silly scenario that we almost

laughed or rolled our eyes when I brought it up. And yet, if it's that silly a scenario, why do so many of us fall prey to that exact situation?

This morning, we are beginning a new series we've entitled *Through the Water*. This is the Sunday each year we celebrate the baptism of Jesus. It's one of those moments we witness the entire Trinity together. But it also reminds us to look at our own baptism. Not just the sacramental act of baptism, but when we actually are called to go through the water and emerge into a new life unlike any we have ever experienced before. In the early church, when you were baptized you were given a new set of clothes, and your old ones would be given to the poor to symbolize you had been birthed into a new life. Over the next several weeks, we will look at what happens when we go through the water.

When we go through the water into a new life with Jesus, we experience freedom. We are set free. I love the imagery of the Messiah in our Scripture from Isaiah. He comes and says come out. Come out and be free. And we, like Lazarus hearing our name called by Jesus, are called to be free into a new life and be set free. A new life. Lazarus, David, Mary, Come out. Come out and be set free.

Yet, one of the tragedies in the Christian life is that so many of us refuse that freedom. We can't imagine anyone saying no to being free, or those boys saying no. Yet, so many of us with freedom at our fingertips with Jesus' voice calling our name, ringing in our ears saying come, be free, and we say *no*. *No, how do I know the freedom you are offering me is better than what I have here? How do I know I can be really free? I have been troubled by things for so many years I'm not even sure I can be free or would know how to act if I was.* I know people who are so trapped by resentment against someone that they wouldn't know how to act if they didn't have the resentment and anger to stoke every day. I know people trapped by sin who are afraid to be free because what will they do with themselves if that sin isn't there any longer?

We wonder, is it dangerous? I mean if it's not dangerous to be set free, I might go for it. If it's safe and can save me from being trapped and actually be free, I might embrace it. Is it dangerous? And Jesus says yes! It's dangerous. It will cost me everything to set you free. It's dangerous to you because you can't be the same person you were when you were trapped. It takes a while to get used to being free, its hard. You'll want to go back.

I hope you were all able to be here last Sunday for our Youth Sunday. They did, as always, a great job. If you haven't, I hope you go back and watch it, because a powerful moment happened in the skit the Youth did. If you remember, God is chiseling away all of the things that He wants to set us free from because you can't be free with all of this stuff holding you down. And at one moment, one of the issues falls off prematurely. Unfortunately, it's one they need to use as the climax of the skit. So he picked it up and puts it back on. And I thought to myself yes. That's exactly it. So often we are set free from something, and it's

hard, it so much changes, we think how much we liked that part of us, and we pick it back up and stick it back on. I mean, I watched it, and said *that's me*. I can be weighed down by things like anyone else and ask God to free me, and He does, and I realize that freedom came with a price, it changes me, and I want to pick it back up again.

My friends, what cave are you in today? Is it one of your own making, your own choices or consequences? We all have caves like that. Is it one others have put you in through, unkind, perhaps even evil thoughts and actions? Is it a cave of sin, a cave of rejection or fear? Whatever it is, you can be set free. Jesus calls your name, He has paid the price, He calls you to come through the water where you can be free and not be burdened by the weights any longer. Will you let Him free you? Sometimes it happens in the blink of an eye. Sometimes that freedom, like for those boys, may take a while. Sometimes God sends someone to help you out. But you can be free. Jesus calls your name to set you free and have new life. Will you come out of the cave?