

First Advent Service

Text: Exodus 5:22-6:12

Theme: Hope for those in bondage

There are so many things that could bring us to despair in this world, but our God is the God of hope. Paul writes in Romans 15:13, *“The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”* But so often we are tempted to desire to live in despair and to even mock the hope that we have been given in Christ. That is what Israel did. In the beginning they actually preferred their bondage over the hope that Moses was giving to them. But our God is the God of hope, even to a nation in bondage.

I. There are times when we prefer the bondage to hope.

It was that way for Israel in Egypt. Joseph had died a long time ago, and Egypt had forgotten what he did for that nation. At the same time, the Israelites had increased in number so much that the Egyptians feared them. They enslaved them and forced them to build cities for Pharaoh. Despite that, the Israelites kept multiplying, and the Egyptians feared them even more. They came up with plans to kill the baby boys to keep down the population. During that time the people groaned and cried out to the Lord for help. God heard their groans. He remembered His covenant with their forefathers. He called Moses and sent him to set Israel free.

You might remember that how Pharaoh replied when Moses and Aaron went to him and said, *“Let my people go,”* Pharaoh replied, *“Who is the Lord that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go.”* The same day he ordered the slave drivers to make the Israelites gather their own straw for the bricks, but to make the same number of bricks each day. When they couldn’t meet the quota, the Israelite foremen were beaten. They found Moses and Aaron and complained that they only brought more trouble. Then Moses complained to God that things had only gotten worse. God responded by promising Moses that He would redeem Israel with an outstretched arm and mighty acts of deliverance. Moses brought this message of hope to Israel, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage. Then God told Moses to return to Pharaoh to tell him to let God’s people go, but even Moses said, that Pharaoh would not listen to him.

The people themselves rejected the hope that God was giving them. They preferred their bondage. This happened over and over again. When they were trapped between Pharaoh’s army and the Red Sea, they said, *“What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt. Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!’”* (Ex 14:4) After they crossed the Red Sea and were saved from Pharaoh’s army, they were in the desert. They even began to look at their bondage as the good old days. They said, *“If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt. There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”* (Ex 16:3) When they got to the promised land, it says that they all wept aloud and grumbled against Moses saying, *“If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword. Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?”* They said to each

other, “*We should choose and leader and go back to Egypt.*” (Num 14:2ff.) Every step of the way, they preferred their bondage.

Are we not tempted in the same way? There are troubles that we have. Sometimes we would rather wallow in our misery, rather than to step out in faith that God will provide. God sends us help and support, but we have become so comfortable with the way that things are, that it brings fear to think that things could be different. We prefer the struggles that we have to something that could be better because it’s what we are used to. We have actually become accustomed to trouble, hardship, and sorrow and can’t imagine anything else. It is even worse when we are in bondage to temptation. There are temptations that attacked each one of us, things that we know have us in their grasp. I heard recently that there are more addictions than ever before. It’s not just things like drugs, alcohol or gambling, but a lot of things that are connected to our phone and other devices. Far too often we would rather be in bondage to those temptations and addictions. They almost give us comfort. We can’t imagine life without them.

II. But God wants to set us free from all that binds us.

He freed Israel with a mighty hand. He introduced Himself to Pharaoh with the 10 plagues until Pharaoh finally let God’s people go. He provided manna, quail, and water in the desert. He enabled them to conquer the promised land, and gave them a land flowing with milk and honey. In Dt 26:8 Moses reminded the people, “*The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.*”

He has freed us through the gift of His Son. Jesus said in John 8, “*Everyone who sins is a slave to sin..., but if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*” Christ freed us from the guilt of our sins when He paid for them all through His innocent suffering and death on the cross. He also frees us from our bondage to temptation. Paul writes in our Epistle lesson that we do not use our freedom to indulge our sinful desires, but that we love our neighbors and live by the fruits of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:13-26) He also promises to free us from all of the evil of this world. There is nothing that can separate us from His love. He cares for us as He cared for the people of Israel when they journeyed through the wilderness. He provides what we need and defends us from all evil, until He brings us to our promised land, His eternal glory in heaven. Paul writes in Romans 8, “*The whole creation will be freed from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.* (Rom 8:21) In Christ God frees us from our bondage to sin, death, and evil, and He will bring us to everlasting joy on that last day when He returns.

This does take a lot of faith. It was indeed a big risk for Moses and the people of Israel to believe God’s Word, that He was about to free them. Initially, Pharaoh did make their lives more miserable. He pursued them and tried to destroy them. They could only live on faith as they traveled through the desert. It also takes a lot of faith for us to give Jesus our sins, our worries, and our fears. There are times when it seems like we should go back to the fears and temptations that bind us. But God is faithful. He was so faithful that He gave His Son for us. He has shown His faithfulness in the lives of His people, and in our own lives too. We trust in Him because He has made His Covenant with us when Christ shed His blood for us on the cross. He assures us of that when we receive our Lord’s Supper this evening. We also know that He has made us His children

in the waters of Holy Baptism. We live in that faith that we are God's people, and He will lead us and protect us with His powerful hand.

It is tempting to desire to live in bondage to the evils of this world when they have become comfortable to us. But Christ has come to free us. It does take as much risk and faith for us to follow Jesus as it took for Israel to follow Moses. But when Christ sets us free from our sins, fears, and all that threatens us, we can live in peace and hope. We are a people of hope that God is for us, and if God is for us, who can be against us. May God grant our hearts that sure hope in Christ our Savior.

Amen.

Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI
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