

FREEDOM

Sermon delivered by Rev. Dr. Roxanne Jones Booth
Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church
July 4, 2021

Scripture: Galatians 5:1; 13

Good morning Renselearville Presbyterian Church! From our presiding officer to all of you my brothers and sisters, I greet you all in the wonderful name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

It is a blessing to be here yet another time to share with you all in worship. I also bring you greetings from the Riverview Missionary Baptist Church in Coeymans, New York where I serve alongside my husband, the Reverend Antonio Booth, as Co-pastor. Thank you for asking me to come again. I pray that I do not wear out my welcome.

Our Scripture that was read earlier is found in Galatians 5: 1 and 13: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery". "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge in the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love."

Our topic this morning is Freedom. To begin, let's turn our attention to Luke 4.

In Luke 4, we read that after Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert at the beginning of his ministry on earth, he went to his home town, Nazareth, where he had been brought up.

On the Sabbath day, which is like our Sunday worship day, Jesus went to the synagogue.

There he read from the Prophet Isaiah. Luke 4:18-19 quotes Jesus reading from the Old Testament passage Isaiah 6:1-2. Jesus read, "The Spirit of the Lord is on

me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

These words summed up the message, the ministry and the mission of Jesus. Jesus came to earth for the purpose of setting us free.

- Free from oppression
- Free from our own self-destruction
- Free from sin

Jesus, in his message to the world, spoke the words of freedom when he commanded evil spirits to "come out" of the demon-possessed.

Jesus served all humankind in his ministry and healed anybody who came to him and welcomed everybody and anybody into his company and to be his followers. Jesus showed no favoritism.

-He healed a military leader's son in Luke 6:1-10, the same way he healed Peter's mother in Luke 5:38-39.

-He raised a woman's son from the dead when he happened upon her at her son's funeral in Luke 7:11-17, just like he raised his good friend Lazarus from the dead in John 11.

-Jesus welcomed the rich like Nicodemus in John 3:1-21 and he welcomed the poor like the blind beggar in Mark 10:46-52.

When Jesus left this earth, he left this same ministry to his followers. He told us in John 20:21, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." Jesus passed on his message, his ministry and his mission to his followers, not just for those who were with him then, but even for us today. Jesus' message, ministry and mission is ours today.

There is no mistaking the purpose of Jesus on earth. He came to set us free—set us free from anything that would prevent us from being all that God created us to be!

Ultimately, Jesus' purpose on earth was to set us free from sin.

Sin entered this world when Adam disobeyed God and ate from the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. The Scripture tells us in Genesis 2: 15 -17 that after God had created the world, "The Lord God took humankind, both male and female and put them in the Garden of Eden to work in it and take care of it. And the Lord God said to humankind, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'"

When God created humankind, he gave us rule over all of creation. In Genesis 1:26 it says, "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'"

Then in Genesis 1:31 it says, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good..."

God created humankind good and God created us to do good. In Ephesians 2:10 it says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

When Adam and Eve ate from the tree that God told them not to eat from, sin entered the world. In Genesis 3:17-19 God said to Adam, "...Because you ...ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it.' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." In other words, you will not live forever.

Adam's act of disobedience ushered in the desolation of all creation. Humankind as well as all creation became separated from God; disconnected from the source of life and well-being.

God allowed humankind to choose whether or not to obey because God created humankind with free will; humankind was given free-will to either choose God's way or not.

Adam, who represents all of humankind, chose to disobey.

For generations from Adam to Moses, from Moses to the Judges and the Kings of Israel, from the time of the Kings and Prophets of the Old Testament Scriptures to the time of Christ on earth, God has desired and has provided a way for humankind to choose him as Lord and Savior, the ruler of life. God has wanted humankind to be in right relationship with him, the Creator and Sustainer of all life.

Then in the fullness of time, the Word of God says in Galatians 4:4-5, "But when time had fully come, God sent his son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law that we might receive the full rights as sons (and daughters)."

God sent Jesus to buy us back, to redeem us, from the world of sin.

Jesus came to snatch us back from living outside of God's goodness and grace, to snatch us back from living in sin.

Jesus' purpose was to free us from sin; to free us from disobedience; to free us from self-pity; free us from greed and depravity, envy, jealousy, strife, murder, deceit and maliciousness.

All that we have given ourselves over to and all that keeps us from experiencing the fullness of God's presence in our lives. Jesus came to free us from by showing us and teaching us how to live for God.

Our stumbling block, what trips us up, is that even though we are free from the power of sin because when we were baptized, we died to our old ways by being buried in the water and coming up out of the water a new creation;

And even though we are free from the penalty of sin, which is death, because Jesus took our sin with him when he was nailed to the cross;

What gives us difficulty in choosing God is that we are not free from the presence of sin.

The evil that humans do: lying, stealing, killing, bad-mouthing, deceiving, sneaking around, being unfaithful in relationships, is still present in our world.

We live in a sin-sick world and are tempted by the sin that surrounds us day and night.

But God, through Jesus Christ, has given us the way to live for Him even in the presence of sin. God has given us his power through the presence of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit enables us to live as God desires and to live a life pleasing to God.

God's Spirit in us is the power we have to live free from sin. Our problem is that we have found it easier not to choose God's way.

It is easier to sin than to do the right thing. Paul, the great missionary and writer of more than half the books in the New Testament knew this very thing. He wrote in Romans 7: 21-23, "...When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members."

Paul goes on to say in Romans 7: 23-25, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? In other words, who will set me free from this consistent struggle that goes on within me between the good I want to do and bad I choose to do? He goes on to say in verse 25, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! Through Jesus Christ I am free!"

Many of us choose to not to accept the gift from God of freedom in Jesus Christ, freedom from this battle of good and evil in our lives and we justify our sinful behavior in our own minds by saying everyone else is doing it.

When I even think about making this my excuse for doing the wrong thing, I can hear my God-fearing mother reminding me, “just because everyone else is jumping into the river and killing themselves, are you going to do it too?”

Following the crowd when the crowd is living a life of self-destruction does not lead to a healthy and prosperous future.

God’s way leads to light, joy and peace even in the presence of sin.

Even through death, heartbreak and heartache God offers us a peace that surpasses all understanding. In Philippians 4:4-7 it says, “Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again; Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is nearby. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Even through monetary loss and economic downturns the Word of God assures us in Philippians 4:9, “And my God will meet (supply) all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

As we fellowship with one another we are encouraged in Galatians 6:10, “As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the household of faith (to the family of believers).”

Christ’s freedom guaranties us the abundant life.

It is for this freedom that Jesus gave up his life. God desires us to live free, surrounded and engulfed in his love, mercy and grace, protected by his Almighty hand and trusting in Him in all situations.

When we are being the people God created us to be, we are being our true selves. We live with the possibilities of creating and doing whatever we put our hearts and minds to do.

Today I challenge us all to be free in Christ. Stand firm on your conviction that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life and do not allow the world and all its deceptions to pull you back to into a life of sin.

Don't allow people who live outside of the grace of God to persuade you to go a different way. Since you have been on this path you know through the Word of God that God's way leads to life eternal, why turn away?

Declare today your Independence Day.

I am free, praise the Lord I'm free
No longer bound, no more chains holding me
My soul is resting, it's just a blessing,
Praise the Lord, Hallelujah, I'm free!