



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Are You Free or Unfree - The First Sunday of Lent- 3_6_2022

I speak to you today as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

Over the past few weeks, I've been doing a meditation as part of the Ignatian exercises. And this is a kind of reworking of the exercises by a contemporary priest. I find them really helpful. This particular exercise that I did recently had a kind of question, and the question was this: are you free or unfree? Are you free or unfree? And standing behind that question is a definition of what it means to be free and what it means to be unfree.

When we are free, we are in a position in which we have a kind of emotional sobriety, a kind of sense of balance in our life. We are able to withstand the different scenarios of outrageous fortune. We can accept the negative emotions that come our way. We can make our way through difficult things and yet not be overwhelmed, because to be free is to be convinced of our identity as a beloved child of God. And it's on the basis of that elemental freedom that we can accept all of these things that come our way and not be defeated by them or not be brought to despair.

And to be unfree is to be captive to those strong emotions, to have sadness that we experience become overwhelming, to have anger run through our veins, to have insecurities consume us, to have an experience of disorder or disease, to be a complete upsetting of our psyche. That is what it's like to be unfree.

And this question, are you free or unfree is something that we always have to ask ourselves continually because life is such that we are constantly being buffeted by new emotions. Life is such that we are constantly experiencing new things, new assaults, new challenges, new oppression, new ways in which we have to learn to cope. Whether it's just the normal progression of aging or it's some kind of trauma that we've experienced, or some kind of challenge in our lives, or some kind of relationship that has gone wrong, or a child who's gone lost and missing, life constantly gives us these opportunities to either choose freedom or choose its opposite. We can choose to be unfree.

One of the things that I have found really helpful in this is that it helps me to identify those things in my life that draw me from being the person God has created me to be, and also draw me from feeling surrounded by the love of

God, because I can become unfree by anything. I can be addicted to literally anything. There's a reason why I don't drink alcohol because I can't. And if I were to, I would be consumed with it, it would hold me captive. And there's a reason why I have to pray through issues around order and control. There's a reason why I have to pray through the insecurities that I feel because these things can hold me captive. They can make me unfree.

But God has called me to be free. God has called me to not so much suppress these things, these cravings, these lacks, these needs, these desires so much as to let them have their own place in my life to recognize them as a kind of gift that I have to befriend in order that they can be transcended by the person God has called me to be. Because freedom is a kind of experience of a kind of freedom from temptation. Now all of this is important for us to think about on this first Sunday of Lent. It can seem like a kind of preoccupation to work on our spiritual lives when the world is so on fire, but every good movement in this world begins on the inside.

In his letter from a Birmingham jail that was written in 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said that the first step in any movement is self purification. And so while we are in the midst of many things that might take us captive and capture our attention and draw us into a constant state of panic, the best thing that you and I can do is to find a way to freedom. And we do that by turning inside and asking ourselves what keeps us unfree and what helps us become free.

Now, all of this is also what is at stake in our gospel today from Luke. Jesus is driven into the wilderness by the spirit, after He begins His ministry, after His baptism. And He goes into the wilderness. And one way for us to understand wilderness is not merely a place that didn't have water or had a lot of sand, a wilderness is any place where you do not have a map, when you do not know the way out, and you do not know where you are. Jesus goes into the wilderness and He fasts for 40 days. He empties himself out and He is tempted by strong desires, by a need for order, by a need for security.

The Devil comes and says to Him, if you are the Son of God, turn this stone into bread. That is a kind of desire that He would know instinctively, knit into his body is the need for food, because He has not been eating for 40 days. And yet Jesus says, that man should not live on bread alone, but from the word of God, a quote that he pulls from the book of Deuteronomy. And in that moment, Jesus befriends hunger. He allows that hunger to have room inside of Him and He does not allow it to take Him over. He becomes free in that moment from His hunger.

The Devil takes Jesus and shows Him in the blink of an eye, all of the kingdoms of the world and gives him a promise of order and the world that Jesus inhabited in the first century, Palestine was much like the world we inhabit today. It was a place full of disorder. And so the promise of order was powerful to

Jesus. And yet Jesus, again, pulls from the scriptures and relies upon God. And most of all, befriends disorder.

This doesn't mean that disorder claims Him, but He allows space for that disorder to be. He trusts in God, He trusts in Himself. He trusts that somehow in the midst of this disorder, God's purpose would be fulfilled. And Jesus is taken by the Devil and He's placed at the pinnacle of the temple, which we're not exactly sure where that is because the temple in Jerusalem didn't have a pinnacle really, but we know it's high up, and He is confronted with the need for security, the confidence that He will always be taken care of. And yet Jesus befriends insecurity. He sees in that insecurity that He no doubt felt as someone who was not a member of the religious leadership, who was yet a religious leader, He befriends that insecurity and holds fast to who God has called Him to be. And He becomes free.

Now in all of these temptations, and there are others if you read the text, it says that when the Devil had finished all of the temptations that he had given to Jesus. So we only get three here, but when the Devil has tempted Jesus in every possible way, all throughout it, the devil does it by trying to upset Jesus's identity. If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread, and so on. So Jesus's choice of freedom, like our choice of freedom, is a way to claim and hold on to His identity, to not be consumed by the craving for bread and other things, to not be consumed by the need for order, to not be consumed by the need for security, but somehow to hold fast to his identity and to choose freedom.

Lent is a time for us to face all the temptations from us, that are around us, and facing us. And one of the things that we have to keep in mind as we try to make this text our own, and to fold our story in the Bible story, one thing that we have to keep in mind is the last line here in the Gospel of Luke, because it is everything, which is that after the Devil had tempted Him, He withdrew and waited for an opportune time. And this is to tell us that the things that we want in this world for ourselves, the things that we find most elusive, the things that we desire fully, that sense of ourselves as beloved by God, that sense of freedom over the things that upset us, or pull us in the wrong direction, that victory even over the demonic and our lives. We cannot wait until things get better for us to do the work of transformation.

There is no good time to grow. Whenever we grow, whenever we face any kind of test in this world, it's always in the midst of trial and challenge and opposition. And this is the world God has made so that we might choose freedom, so that we might realize ourselves as beloved by God and Christ. Are you free or are you unfree?

Lent is not a time of doing new techniques of prayer, but it is a time of transformation. And I want to invite you to take some time this week to enter that exercise with me, create some space and ask yourself that question. And as you

consider all the things that make you unfree, name them and hold them up and invite God to come in and befriend that thing that captivates you as well. Begin to look at that claim, that power, that addiction from a new perspective, from God's perspective. Let those things that make you unfree have some room in your life so that you can place them in God's hands. And you can begin to not only name what they are, but begin with Christ to know why you are called and pulled in that direction a little bit better.

And then take a moment and create some space and name all the things that you are now free from, the things that you now have that make your life rich and beautiful and worthy and lovely and powerful. The things that give you hope, the forgiveness you've been able to do, and the resentment you've been able to let go, the insecurities you've been able to live with, the disorder you've been able to accept. All of these things and again, invite Christ in and celebrate because Christ was there from the beginning. And Christ, having befriended all of these things in befriending humanity, walks with us and lifts us up and wants to celebrate with us as we make our way to the Cross and to the grave and to resurrection.

May you find the freedom and the identity that God has been waiting to give you from the beginning and forever.

Amen.