



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

What Liberates You - The Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost - 8_21_2022

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I speak to you 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.

There are times in my life where I find it difficult to find God; where I read the scriptures as closely as I can, when I look for God in my surroundings. And even though I am surrounded by religion all the time, I'm not always aware of where God is. And then there are other times in my life. Where it doesn't matter if I'm reading the Bible, it doesn't matter if I'm at church or not. It doesn't matter if I'm doing the work of a priest, but God comes and finds me. And often these are moments that I cannot predict and I cannot control. And I have no other option but to somehow receive the word that comes to me.

And this summer has been one of those times in which God just keeps on finding me again and again and again. It happened this week yet again. I was contemplating the gospel for today and I was kind of mulling it over in my mind and I kept on focusing on this word in Greek, *apoluo*, which means to be released. When Jesus speaks about healing here, and when the gospel writers speak about healing, they speak about being released. And I was so focused on that message of liberation that I wasn't quite sure what I was going to say at the beginning of the sermon.

But then on Thursday morning, I go to the gym and there's this friend that I have at the gym. She's full of tattoos and piercings, and she also is a practicing Muslim. And for reasons that are mysterious, she knows I'm a priest. And she loves to engage me in spiritual conversations. And it doesn't matter where we are, she'll come up and she'll just start a spiritual conversation. It'll be a kind of mix of Rilke and Rohr and a Sunni prophet, and then a Sufi poet, and she just kind of freestyles spirituality all the time.

And it's always on things where I feel completely physically compromised. So we'll be on the stair stepper. She'll come up next to me and she'll just be bouncing along on the stair stepper. And meanwhile, I'm like, ugh, like just trying to get that last 10 minutes, and she'll be like, do you know what I'm learning today? And I'm just like, and I'm like, yeah, yeah, yeah.

So Thursday began like any other with her. She came right next to me, and I was actually feeling okay on the stair stepper. And she said, "I want to ask you a

question about the Gospel of Luke, this woman who is healed from a hemorrhage." And I said, "Well, that's actually very similar to the passage I'm about to preach about." She said, "Someone directed me to it and I went looking." I said, "Well, it's actually in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And it's one of the most amazing miracle stories. A woman with a hemorrhage for many, many years is cured. What struck you about it?" And she said, "I just was incredibly moved by the fact that Jesus felt power come from Him and healed this woman. And that really struck me."

I said, "Well, that's interesting because the passage I'm going to be preaching about this Sunday, it's a little bit like the flip side of that power from the perspective of liberation, because I'm dealing with another woman who has been suffering for years. And instead of power being the dominant metaphor in the text, it's liberation, which of course is speaking about the same thing, but just differently. Instead of being the power of regeneration, it's the liberation that comes from resurrection.

Then as we're speaking, out of nowhere, this humongous guy comes up to her, completely ignores me, which is probably okay, and he says to her, "Hey, how long have we known each other?" She says to him, "Fifteen years. And you've hated me every one of those days." And later I asked her, "What does she mean by that?" And she said that for whatever reason, there is that interaction between men and women at gyms that we all know too well where men feel like they can always go up and speak to women. He has been just plaguing her. And when he discovered that she was a Muslim, he began to tease her and one time brought in a jar of sand and said, this is from your home country. I went to the beach.

And then another time she decided to kind of give it back. When he began to swear loudly in the weight room, she turned to him and said, "Hey, hey, it's Sunday, it's the Lord's day. Watch your mouth." He said, "Of course, what do you know about God, you worship Allah?" But this encounter with her was different. After she said, "You've hated me for 15 years," he said, "Can I be serious for a second?" And he leans in and he tells her that his father is dying and she immediately showed him incredible mercy. She said to him, "Well, you know your father is surrounded by angels now. And in my tradition, we have a saying, if we knew the joy that the dead were going to, we would not weep for their loss. We'd weep for ourselves. Your father is safe and secure in God's arms."

And they made plans to keep in touch, and on Saturday, he texted her to tell her that his father had died. She turned to me and she said, "We live in a time where, when we run into a crisis, we turn to our technology. We go to our phone. I think he just wanted human contact. And the fact that we had argued about God meant that God was the topic of conversation, and so he reached out to me." As I was watching this exchange, and as he walked away, I was profoundly moved

because in that moment, when she chose to not conform to the stereotypes that had been thrown upon her, when she chose not to continue the tit for tat, when she saw him raise that white flag, she responded with incredible grace and incredible love and mercy towards him. She liberated him and she embodied her own liberation.

In other conversations, she told me that one of the things that she has to manage is just telling her children that after 9/11, people are going to hate them for no reason. And to encourage them to see through that hate, to find that good that's there in another person. And when she embodied that it became her way of experiencing liberation. Now I thought about this moment when I was thinking about the gospel for today, because if it is the case that Jesus is a liberator in this woman's life, there is a sense in which that encounter on Thursday morning, between that woman and her oppressor was as much a miracle as when Jesus healed that woman who had been struggling with curvature of the spine for 18 years.

The message that I want to have you all attend to today, the question I want you to ask yourself is what is the liberation that God is inviting us to today? All of us struggle. It's the nature of life. All of us are burdened. It's the nature of life. All of us experience sorrow in one sense or another. It can overwhelm us. It's the nature of life. To be alive is to experience opposition. To be alive is to experience some kind of threat of disease. To be alive is to be in the shadow of death. To be alive is to somehow be grieving one thing or another. And all of us know what that is like today. What liberates you today? And the answer today's gospel is suggesting is that it is Jesus, who is the force, the power of liberation. Whether acknowledged or unacknowledged, Jesus is the power of liberation.

And the second thing that this incredible encounter helped me to see in today's gospel differently today is that that liberation is not just an individual thing. It's also a kind of interpersonal and communal thing. When we find liberation, it's a little bit like a stone hitting a puddle and the rings spread. Because the more we live into that liberation, the more we see the dignity that God has given us, the more we understand the love God has for us, the more we feel like we can be greater than the things that have happened to us that are bad and evil.

The more we do those things, the more someone else gets liberated. Because when Jesus reached out to that woman, he was crossing an incredible chasm in his society. Men did not talk to women in the public sphere in Jesus' society. Men did not touch women in the public sphere in Jesus's society. Men did not listen to women in Jesus's time in that public sphere. And yet, Jesus sees her, He hears her, He listens to her and He liberates her.

And in addition to that particular network of all too human power, there was also the fact that the woman was suffering from a malady which affected how she

looked. And that disease, that curvature of the spine meant that she was considered to be punished by God and profane. She was not able to enter certain spaces in Jerusalem. But Jesus saw her as the place and site, as the embodiment of holiness. And that was part of her liberation.

And when we talk about the church trying to live up to inclusion and transformation, we are not so much trying to bend with the times, but we are trying to rediscover that incredible miracle of liberation that Jesus said when he spoke into existence the freedom and cure of this woman. We are just trying to catch up to that liberating word that Jesus spoke and affected with his hands. And the church will always be catching up to it because there will always be networks of power. There will always be tensions over gender and privilege and power in our world. That is just the state of where things are and will be.

But we have been called to be liberators. Because not only are we the recipients of liberation, we have to find our way into being agents of liberation because Christ works through us. That's the promise of the gospel too. Christ works through us, which means we can have the eyes of Christ in a certain circumstance when no one else does. Christ works through us, which means we can speak a word of liberation to someone else where we see their dignity, when it has been eroded or neglected or ignored or denigrated. In all these things, that liberation that Jesus brings is powerful. And whether she knows it or not, and whether it is acknowledged or not, when she reached out to her oppressor, to the guy that makes her life difficult in the gym, the guy who gives her a hard time as one would say, she was being a liberator. She released him. How amazing.

The final thing I want you to see today is that today's gospel pivots around the Sabbath. It's an argument over whether or not it was right for Jesus to cure on the Sabbath. And that's an interesting question because the Sabbath was meant to be a time of rest. It was meant to be a time set apart. It was meant to be a time in which you didn't turn on lights, as we would say today, where you wouldn't do any kind of work because that was meant to be the time in which you entered the seventh day of God's rest. It was holy.

But from the beginning in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus has been redefining the Sabbath. It was on the Sabbath that he stood up in the synagogue and said, the spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, and to set free those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Jesus redefines the Sabbath early on in His ministry, not as a place of rest, but a place of restoration; not as a place in which we retreat, but a place of resurrection; not as a place in which it is set apart, but a place that begins to make the world new through His life, which is greater than death.

So the Sabbath isn't one day a week. It isn't a set apart space. It's everywhere. Anywhere we find Jesus is the Sabbath, because the Sabbath is no longer the time in which we enter the rest of God so much as it's the time in which we experience the resurrection of God. And that can happen anywhere. The question I have is where is it happening for you? In the midst of death, in the midst of struggle, in the midst of all the things that you are working through, as you find your way today, where is that Sabbath of resurrection through Jesus happening for you? What liberates you? How can you be an agent of liberation? How can you be a channel of liberation in someone else's life? And where do you find that Sabbath of resurrection?

Amen.