

## **IT'S A STORY OF DEATH AND LIFE – OF BONDAGE AND LIBERATION**

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 22, 2024

You just heard nine scriptural passages: nine threads proclaimed by word and song of the Gospel story. They traveled a path from Genesis to Isaiah to Matthew and Luke and finally John; each thread connected to the one after it; each thread revealing a facet of the story; of the journey from death to life; from bondage into freedom. This story is my story; and it is your story.

It is a story as ancient as the stars embedded in the very fibers of creation. A story of birth and death; of bondage and liberation. Before the first microbes ever appeared on this earth, there were stars already being born and dying. For us who are Christians, it began with a Jewish origin story, and with a man and a woman who were both naked and free from guilt and shame. They walked together daily, in a place of vulnerability and intimacy before each other and before God. That is, until the day came when a tear formed in the fabric of their Oneness. We are told that in shame they hid themselves from each other, and from God. A picture of bondage and death became like a foreign virus infecting all of humanity, and all of creation.

But bondage and death did not have the final word. A message of hope was given through an angel to the patriarch of an ancient nomadic people. The angelic being told Abraham: "This is what the Lord says: Because you have obeyed me...I swear by my own name that I will certainly bless you. I will multiply your descendants beyond number...And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed." How was God going to bring about this blessing, this promise of life?

We find the answer in the prophet Isaiah's words: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given...and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." To all humanity that has dwelt in deep darkness and death, a glorious light of hope and life and liberation would shine, coming through a child yet to be born; a child who would be the light to the Hebrew people, and to all the peoples of the earth.

The prophet says further regarding this child: "the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding...He will give justice to the poor and make fair decisions for the exploited." The promise was given of freedom and justice to the poor and oppressed across the earth; to the early Christian Church, struggling under Roman persecution, unorthodox Christians being jailed and tortured and ostracized under the Inquisitions. Pagan nations who were conquered and killed by the Christian Crusaders. And the list of those in bondage and oppression and exploitation can go on and on and on.

They would include many African people shackled and traded to the colonies. The native peoples of many nations whose lands were stolen and many murdered. Wars and the stealing and killing, all for wealth and the plundering of resources. The Jewish lives that were lost during the Holocaust. The Armenians and Tutsi and Ukrainian's and Palestinians. The poor of many lands left to the mercy of the powerful and wealthy. The list of those dying and in various forms of bondage is never-ending.

But if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that none of us are completely free. We all wear shackles of various kinds; the bonds of a persistent sin, a personality trait that is detrimental to us and to those around us, a traumatic experience from our past that still impacts our lives. An unwillingness to allow the Holy Spirit to transform some area of our life.

But this darkness and bondage endemic to all creation, and the malignant hopelessness it breeds, was suddenly obliterated by the blinding light of hope in the inbreaking of God to this world. Luke's Gospel tells us of this child who would come: "behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people (for ALL people). For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour (a liberator), which is Christ the Lord." He came to free humanity from every form of death and darkness and bondage.

The lessons today wrap up with John's Gospel. There John spoke of the child, this "Christ the Lord" who would come to free us all. He wrote: "But as many as received him, to them he gave the power to become the sons of God...who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." You and I have been born of God. And God has given us power through the Holy Spirit to become Children of God, to grow up into our heritage as God's children. Your purpose and mine, which is the same as God's purpose, is to bring light into every corner of darkness; to bring hope where there is hopelessness; freedom where there is bondage; equity where there is inequality. To usher in the glorious reign of God.

God has called each of us to freedom, and to aid others in finding freedom as well. We are called to stand up for the freedom and equality of others who find themselves in various forms of bondage.

May each of us walk in the freedom of the children of God.