

Isaiah 58:9b-14; Psalm 103:1-8; Hebrews 12:18-29; Luke 13:10-17

How many of you are slaves? A couple of people are trying to figure it out, what's the right answer? Alright. If you are a slave, what are you a slave to? "My job," ok, ok. What else might you be a slave to, "disability," "slave to Christ," "a slave to sin." We are enslaved by a lot of things. We confess in our confession you know, that we are in bondage, slavery to sin, we cannot free ourselves.

This week I was having a Bible study with a church that I am finishing an intern with and but we never got to the study of Revelation because we started talking about sin and grace and forgiveness and a lot of this stuff that kind of really, you need to talk about and understand before you can really live out your faith, because we all have different ideas of sin and grace. And sadly, most of us aren't very familiar with what Martin Luther actually said. I know a lot of Lutherans, they say, well, Martin Luther, he gave it to the Pope. You know, he stood up and reformed the church. But, one of the things that Luther was big on was intention and integrity and your words and your actions. And the idea of the priesthood of all believers that God creates us all equal, that deep down all of us are equal in the eyes of God. And we are in bondage to sin and only Christ can _____?

Now the human spirit often wants to use a later theology. We climb our way to heaven. A lot of the old churches, if you have ever seen, they have lots of steps. Their sanctuaries are often up on the second and third floor. I have been in a lot of churches and believe me a lot of them are so high up now their wanting elevators or something because all the members are getting older and it is hard to get up all those steps.

In bondage, sin. In bondage to thinking about money and can we afford it, rather than does God want this. We're in bondage to worrying about what other people will think rather than doing what we think is right. Maybe that is why we struggle so much in the Lutheran church with evangelism, because a lot of people, they want evangelism, they want more people, but nobody wants to go invite someone. I think last week I mentioned, and seeing there's a lot of different people here this week, I am going to mention it again. The average Lutheran has invited someone to church once in the last twenty-seven years. And a you can imagine that makes for a very slow and small growth. Imagine if every person were able to invite just one person during the week to come to church. And even if half of those people decide not to come, their busy or whatever, still we'd have a lot more people. But we're in bondage, we're in fear. What are the people going to think. Their going to think I am one of those strange Christians. One of those, wear it on your sleeve Christians, and I don't want to be that. How many of you from last week actually sang or hummed one of your favorite hymns in the grocery store? That is what I was afraid of, ok. Again, for those of you who are new, I suggested that maybe that singing or humming a favorite hymn or favorite song from camp, if you went to camp. And if you do it in the beginning of your shopping you might notice by the time you done in the store you might actually hear somebody else humming or singing it and they might not even know why it is in their mind. And maybe spread the news that way. But we're afraid. We are in bondage to fear.

Think of the things we're afraid of. We said we're in bondage to our job, we're in bondage to sin, we're in bondage to worrying about money, we're in bondage some people would say, marriage bonds are like bondage. That is a good bond bad bond depends on the day and where you are in your life. But we all know it goes up and down. There are good kinds of bondage. Bondage to Christ. If we could really be slaves of Christ, we'd probably all be better off. That might be the goal. But how many of us can really say that we have been true slaves to Christ this week.

Well, Jesus came to free people from bondage. He came to free the hungry from focusing on hunger all their life. Sometimes he even fed multitudes. Other times he fed with the word of comfort and of hope. He came to free prisoners. He came to let them know that God doesn't automatically condemn some one just because society decides they need to be in prison. And Jesus in a lot of his teachings reminds us there is some sins that are hidden, that are just as bad as the ones we see. We human beings, we often want to give it to those people who commit really bad sins. They break the commandments, most Christians "well I keep the commandments, at least. I try to be a good Christian." And we think well, I haven't murdered anyone this week and I haven't robbed any banks this week. We think of all the things, the extreme and we haven't done that, we have been good Christians. But as Luther says, we sin every day. Every time we insult our neighbor we're killing them a little piece at a time. Not like the shark, a big bite, but more like a piranha fish, a little ounce of flesh at a time. Jesus came, this woman who comes to Jesus, on the Sabbath, she comes to the temple to worship and he heals her. He frees her from that bondage. From years and years of disability. From years and years of focusing on her limitations. From years and years of hopelessness of thinking well this is how life is until the day I die. Have you ever been like that? In the midst of a problem or something, or really bad situation—maybe grieving the loss of a husband or wife, a child or a parent and you think it is never going to get better. Or maybe you've lost a job and those first few days its just like it is so dark, it's like, is life ever going to be bright again? Hopelessness is one of the sins. When we take ourselves so important that losing a job or losing a loved one or being sick or whatever, it's like the whole world has changed. We over react because we think we're at the center of the world. Gradually maybe we get perspective. We try to get our feet back on the ground, or maybe God straightens out our face so that we can build ?? one step at a time, continue the journey.

But as Jesus is freeing this woman from all of that from just being stuck and having to rely on strangers and we all know that's a fate almost worse then death, isn't it? How many of you would want to have to rely on strangers? How many of you would want to give up your job and all your savings and investment and whatever else you have and just go on the street and depend on people's generosity? ?? and worse then that. We don't want to have to rely on other people. That is why we want to build up our pot for ourselves, our little nest egg, our pantry, our job. We don't want to have to rely on anyone else, not even God.

Jesus heals this woman completely. Woman you are set free from your ailment. FREE. Right now what might you do to prove that you are free? Maybe we aren't all still slaves. What are people going to think? Would standing up and shouting Alleluia make anyone feel free? I was hoping someone was going to answer go ahead and do it. Alleluia. He laid his hands on her. Immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. In the scripture we see people aren't so circumspect. When something good happens, they praise God, they sing, they dance, they

make noise. This woman gets up, she praises God. She has been handicap and all of a sudden she is free and she just doesn't say 'O thank you, Jesus.'" She stands up and praises God. "O God is so great, O Lord of heaven and earth." And it attracts some attention. Isn't praise suppose to attract attention? Why aren't there enough bad and ugly things attracting attention in this world. Our nightly news, every night people seem to compete to see how bad they can be and attract attention. Well wouldn't some praise of God attracting attention be a good thing? If someone heard you standing up and shouting Alleluia in the strangest place, might that be a good kind of craziness? We Lutherans especially, so inhibited, so afraid of walking outside the box. We don't even want to touch the edge of the box because someone outside might see the box bending a little bit. Might see that we're in there. If Jesus were to heal us or free us from something, could we dare to stand up and praise God? Sing a little bit, dance a little bit.

Now the Pharisees, the leaders of the synagogue, their indignant. They show the human side of things, ok. Human side of things say reward and punishment, everything in its place and this is not in its place because this is the Sabbath—and on the Sabbath we're not suppose to do any of that stuff, we're not suppose to work and healing is work. Freeing someone is work. In a way they were right. Jesus was working on the Sabbath. But he reminds them, well wouldn't you free your donkey on the Sabbath, your animals. You farmers, you know you can't just leave the animals for twenty-four hours. You got to go let them out, you got to milk the cows if you got cows. We got to do things for the animals. Isn't this woman more important then an animal? I think most of us have been glad that doctors and nurses have worked on Sundays. But I still hear complaints from some people, why do we have to have the stores open on Sundays and the restaurants and all this? I always ask them, have you ever gone to the restaurant on Sunday after church? Oh yes pastor, if it is open I might as well go then I don't have to work at cooking the dinner. And I remind them that the more people that go to the restaurants, the more restaurants are going to be open and the more people are going to have to work on Sunday and so don't complain about the laws and what their doing. If you don't want so many people working on Sunday, then don't go to places where their going to have to work. Don't go shopping, even window shopping, even if you don't spend money. The more people that are there it tells the stores—hey it's worth opening up, lets tell our employees. Now we're not going to go back in time, we're not going to go back to the days when nothing was open on Sunday, but before we complain we should realize we are part of it. We are all a part of it. But we want to criticize someone else, instead of ourselves.

The Pharisees criticized Jesus for breaking the law, for breaking the Sabbath. But that is exactly what Jesus came to do, break the bonds of the law, to free us from the law. Now this has been explained in lots of different ways, by lots of different theologians and even in Lutheran circles there are different ways of understanding what Luther meant about law and gospel. A lot of Lutherans, we have different understandings and some think that law is Old Testament and gospel is New Testament. But you can find lots of exceptions to that, there is a lot of gospel in the Old Testament and there is a lot law in the New Testament so that is not really so clean cut. And then there is the idea of three uses of the law. You know, God uses the law to kind of hammer us and prove that we are sinners and then you know that God uses the law to kind of give us a frame for society so there is security because we human beings need security. And actually that is a gift, because without it we'd be in kayos and that would be worse than anything else.

Or maybe we can see the law as a two-edged sword, it cuts both ways. It cuts the other person, but it cuts our self. It cuts us down, but it also cuts some of that bad stuff off from us. And Jesus wants to free us from our fear and bondage to the law. Because again the human tendency is to lift the law up almost like a God. The law is our way to please God. We obey the commandments, we be good Christians, and then we'll please God and we'll get to live happily ever after for ever. And then so sadly we take the next step. Now that I am being good, I can look down on all those other people who are still sitting and I can tell them what they are doing wrong. As Jesus always said, "take the log out of your own eye before you look for the speck in the other person's eye." Jesus came to free us, to free us from worrying. It is as if we're running the race of life. And God Jesus has already told us you know my Father has a trophy for you. In this week of Olympics, you know we think about trophies and gold medals. Well God already has a gold medal with your name on it. You've already got eternal life, salvation. That makes us feel uneasy. Well how can I already have that? I haven't finished the race yet, I am still alive. How can that be? Because again, we're use to reward and punishment, not love and luxury. So try to picture that trophy that is waiting for you. Now that you have your trophy waiting for you at the finish line, what are you going to do? Are you going to just stop and sit down and say I don't have to rush, I'll get that trophy you know when ever I finish. Or are you going to run the race and say I got a trophy, I am going to go run and get it. I don't have to run, but I want to run as a thank you to God.

The good things we do aren't to get God's favor. We got that when we were still ? _____. The good things we do are for the future of the church so that other people can see us and say "Jesus Christ does make a difference." Oh that is something I want to be a part of. For the joy, the hopefulness, the love going on in that group of people, I just want to be part of that. Have you known churches like that? Have you known groups within churches like that? Last week I talked to one or two people who said they find that here. And that is good, that people feel accepted here for who they are, they don't have to dress up or impress, they can be themselves. There are a lot of people who won't go through church walls because their afraid of judging. We might have to bring the church to them. Talk to our neighbor over the fence or in the grocery isle or where ever. I use the grocery store because that's where most of us are some point in time. Think of some other places, work, community places, school, PTA. Christ came to free people. We're already free and our job is to let others know. Kind of like the homeless man telling the other person where he can find some shelter. The hungry beggar who tells the other beggar where he can find some food, and believe me they do that. Pastors learn early on you know, if you're very generous in helping people in need, you know the next day you'll have three people with the same story. And it is hard then to know which of these people are telling the truth and which aren't. But word gets around. One Christmas day it was Sunday, Christmas afternoon, we had had just one morning service and after the service somebody was waiting outside the church and came in to see the pastor and talk to me and they had this story about how they were going down south to get a job and they needed money for gas and you know, it was Christmas and I thought well, Jesus wants us to help all in need. So I took him to the gas station, filled up the car with gas, he left thanking pastor. Well next week, New Year's Day, right after church, someone's waiting in the wings after church. Can I talk to the pastor? And I talked to him, pastor I am starting a new job tomorrow and I need to get a ride down to South Carolina. And it was like a little too similar to the story of ? _____. I gave that person gas you

know, at least their not going to be able to buy alcohol or other stuff. Let God be the judge you know, whether he was going, I don't know.

Except in the church. In the church we want to keep it simple. We don't want to tell our neighbors, "Oh we go to Trinity Lutheran, we went to the contemporary service last night or we go to Sunday, what time is that, the 10:30 I guess, the traditional service, I'll say again, I am visiting so I am not familiar with the schedule." And maybe some of you go to other churches, well talk them up too. And maybe you know your neighbor goes to the Methodist church. Well that is fine, it is the same Lord. And if they see that your open to that, they might be more open to asking you what are those Lutherans doing? Jesus came to free us all. Even on the Sabbath, even at the price of breaking the commands. Jesus shows his love for us. I could go on and on, I am sensing some sleepiness in some quarters and some antsyneess in others so lets close with a pray.

Heavenly Father, we ask that you continue to bless us day by day. Bless your word that it would take root deeper and deeper in our lives that it would bear fruit through our lives in reaching out and touching others with your love and your freedom. We pray these things as your children forever who love you and need you.

Amen