

**LIBERATION**  
*Sermon for Easter 3B-Lk 24:36b-48*  
LPC, 4/19/15

For people of my generation the word “liberation” has a lot of connotations. There was Black Liberation in the 60’s and Women’s Liberation in the 70’s. In the 80’s we churchy types heard a lot about Liberation Theology in Latin America, with its radical commitment to the welfare of the poor and its overtones of economic and political revolution.

The word “liberation” has also been used as a euphemism for its exact opposite. Imperialistic movements speak of “liberating” other peoples and countries when they really mean they are annexing or conquering them. My son’s college fraternity joked about “liberating” the recycling bins of the rival fraternity across the street in a fraternity prank. This was all in good fun, but it was, technically, trespass and theft.

I hope through all this the concept of liberation has not become debased or passé. Because liberation is really what the Christian Gospel is all about. I think this sometimes gets lost in all the shouting. I think that Christ’s message of liberation accounts for the fantastic expansion of Christianity after Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension. I also think the relative absence of liberation from the public face of Christianity is part of what accounts for the poor opinion some non-believers have of our faith.

What I think liberation means in a Christian sense is freedom from oppression. Oppression can come in two ways. There is oppression from without. The people of Israel prayed for liberation from slavery in Egypt, and according to our book of Exodus, they got it. African-American slaves prayed for liberation and found comfort in liberation texts from the bible. Working with elderly, poor African-Americans years ago it was clear to me that bible texts and hymns about liberation still particularly resonate with the Black population. In Latin America, the Liberation movement arose in reaction to widespread exploitation of the poor, and found powerful proponents in the Catholic Church.

Jesus is all about liberation. Jesus said, “Come to me you that are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. But Jesus also understood that oppression doesn’t always come from outside, physical forces. People also, perversely, oppress themselves. They can do this by unconsciously acceding to the oppressive expectations of others. This is what the Women’s Movement opposed. This type of oppression was also going on in Jesus’ day with the Pharisees, who with their insistence on strict and literal adherence to the law convinced the poor that they, the poor, were less worthy of God’s favor.

But sometimes people oppress themselves by their own actions. This actually could be a definition of sin. Sin is self-oppression. Anything self-destructive is sin: shame, guilt; addictions, great and small; behavior that debases our own humanity or that of others; actions that are not worthy of our status as children of God; negative self-talk; all this is self-oppression. We all do it.

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Self-oppression eats us up. We have to get rid of it or it consumes us. God would have us stop this cycle. Everything Jesus does is toward the breaking of oppressive cycles.

The breaking of self-oppressive cycles is repentance and forgiveness of sins. In today's Gospel lesson from Luke, Jesus says that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations. So that is what I am doing this morning. In repentance and forgiveness is freedom ... the freedom we all crave in our deepest hearts and assume we can't have because we can't ever seem to make it happen ourselves.

Good news! We don't have to make it happen! Jesus Christ has already made it happen! Now to claim the liberation that Jesus offers we have to repent and be forgiven. Please know that repentance is not just naming your fault and promising never to do it again. That, frankly, doesn't work real well.

You know what type of repentance really works and leads to liberation? You know who really knows better than anybody else? People in 12-Step programs. They don't usually call it repentance. They usually call it "Step One." Step One is "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol (or drugs, or gambling, or overeating, or whatever.)" That's repentance: Admitting powerless over our inclination to sin, to cause each other pain, and to act self-destructively.

This is something we can't do by ourselves. If it were something we could do ourselves then none of us would be carrying around any burdens at all. Everybody would be happy and fulfilled all the time.

Once repentance happens, God freely offers forgiveness. And forgiveness is as described in the reading from Acts, the wiping out of sin: the wiping out of shame, guilt, addiction, self-destructive behavior, action not worthy of a child of God. Forgiveness is liberation from self-enslavement.

What does Jesus often say after healing someone of a physical affliction? "Go and sin no more." It's like he's saying, "There. I have liberated you from your suffering. Please don't now enslave yourself, because if you do, you'll suffer, and I don't want to see you submit to suffering again."

This is essentially what God did after leading the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt. What did God do after that? God gave the people the Ten Commandments. It was like God was saying, "There, I have liberated you from slavery in Egypt. Please don't now enslave yourselves. Here are ten ways to avoid self-enslavement.

You can be free from all that stuff that wears you down: feelings of guilt, shame and inadequacy, despair, prejudice, even crankiness and world-weariness. You know all that stuff that makes you say, "I don't want to be this way"? Guess what? You don't have to be that way. The ways of Jesus Christ are the ways of liberation. The way of Christ is freedom.