

Chapel Hill United Church of Christ

Sunday Sermon

Liberated!

Luke 4: 1-13
Deuteronomy 26: 1-11

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February 21, 2010

“The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Prayer: Out of the depths of our struggles we cry to you, O God. Please move us forward with your liberating power. Amen.

On Friday morning, I was watching “Today” on NBC, and Matt Lauer made the announcement that Tiger Woods was going to make a statement at 11:00 a.m. that morning. Truth be told, I saw online the day before that Tiger was likely going to hold a press conference on Friday, and it was likely to be some sort of apology. Well, 11:00 a.m. rolled around, I hadn’t turned off the TV yet, and I thought what Tiger had to say might be interesting, so I listened. Honestly, I thought he was sincere in his admission that he had a sex addiction. I sensed that he was truthful when he admitted that he thought of himself as being above societal boundaries. I thought he was hopeful, too—he said he hoped to be on the golf course again, but he couldn’t say when. I also sensed that Tiger thought of himself truly as a work in progress. He said that he was going back to rehab the very next day. He has more work to do.

Naturally, the critics have made their voices known. The whole thing, they said, was very scripted. Very controlled. Only a select few people were present, among them 3 or 4 reporters. There was no opportunity for questions. And, of course, several commented that Tiger's actions were unforgivable, in spite of his confession/apology. That is not the focus of this sermon, by the way, so I will leave the ease at which people are reluctant to forgive for another Sunday.

What is the focus of this sermon is the fact that human beings can get locked into unhealthy behavior patterns that will continue to denigrate our inner spirit unless we get liberated from their grip. It's not that sex is wrong and bad in and of itself. It's not. But, when the desire for sex and the love of sex governs one's behavior and pushes one to behave sex outside what is deemed as acceptable societal boundaries, then sex becomes an addiction. Sex is given a power which can start to control a person instead of the person controlling it.

Whenever our desire and love for something is allowed to have that kind of power over us, whether it be sex, or alcohol, or drugs, or gambling, or money, or whatever it is... it can become addictive. It can become oppressive. It can enslave a person. It becomes one's "Egypt."

Egypt is a metaphor for us today. Egypt, in and of itself, is not bad. Abram, the wandering Aramaean, along with Sarai, his wife, end up in Egypt due to a famine in

their own homeland. They reside as “aliens” in Egypt, which was OK (Genesis 12: 10). When things improved at home, then they returned back there.

Four generations later, Abraham’s great grandson Joseph and all his family end up in Egypt again. They settle down there, and life is good. For the time being, their Egyptian experience is a prosperous one. Their life in Egypt was a pretty good thing.

So, if Egypt can be thought of as a metaphor for some of our experiences, this might mean that in the context of appropriate boundaries, the things we live with, like sex, or alcohol, or drugs, or gambling, or money, etc., in and of themselves, are not bad things.

But, Egypt turned bad for Abraham’s descendants. Egypt becomes a place where the powerful Egyptians began to lord it over the descendants of Abraham. In fact, those descendants become enslaved by the Egyptians. The grip of Egypt’s oppressive power and dominance took hold, and Abraham’s descendants, Israelites, cried out to God. And, the Lord heard their voice, saw their affliction. Using Moses, the Lord liberated them out of Egypt.

Metaphorically speaking, some of the things we live with are not bad in and of themselves, but can turn bad and oppressive if our desire and love for them dominates our inner spirit. That’s when addiction has taken hold, and a relentless

grip can consume the inner psyche of a person.

When a person knows that he or she cannot break this relentless grip, very likely, that person cries out to God. The first step of the twelve steps in Alcoholics Anonymous is for a person to admit powerlessness over alcohol. The second step is for the person to believe that a Power greater than him or herself can restore sanity in that person's life (http://www.aa.org/lang/en/en_pdfs/smf-121_en.pdf). Out of powerlessness, the alcoholic cries out to God.

When we cry out to God out of whatever our Egyptian affliction is, it's a cry of powerlessness. The blessing is that God hears our cries, too. God knows what enslaves us. God understands what tempts us. God knows what is our form of Egypt.

We know it too, most likely. It is likely what tempts you the most. You can ask yourself, "What have I given power to that now controls part of my life? What desire is part of me that I have to hold at bay all the time? What do I constantly need to work at?"

Now think back. Was there a time when you made some headway? Remember when you got out of Egypt... when you held your Egypt at bay? When you overcame your temptation. When you were liberated!

Maybe it happened due to counseling. Or during rehab. Maybe you started a spiritual practice which helped. I know a person who succeeded in quitting smoking because of wearing the nicotine patch, and she swears she cried out to God as she used the patch. That's what got her through! What liberation!

The descendants of Abraham cried out to God, and God heard them. God liberated them through Moses who is now directing them to remember God's mighty liberating power.

Their story is our story because for us as Christians, we understand that our instruction is to remember that Jesus Christ liberated us from the oppression of sin's enslavement. God liberated us out of the bondage of being separated from God because of Jesus Christ.

When you are living in this new, liberated state, which is to live away from the oppression of sin, away from the enslavement of vices, away from the grip of addiction, don't forget to come back to God giving thanks. Come back and give a portion of the new, liberated place in your life back to God by thanking God.

Didn't the one leprous man out of the ten who were healed come back to Jesus and give thanks for his liberated state? Jesus was incredulous that the other nine never showed up who were Israelites (Luke 17: 12-22)! The One was a foreigner...a non-Jewish Samaritan. Remember...Give thanks to God!

I wonder if another way to give a portion of our life back to God is to live differently? Might we, in our liberated state, relearn healthy practices? Doesn't Tiger Woods need to relearn what it means to be in a loving relationship with Elin, his wife? Might the liberated smoker need to relearn what it means to breathe in fresh, clean air? Doesn't the liberated food addict need to change eating habits for the rest of his or her life? Might the liberated grudge holder seriously consider forgiveness and practice it?

For all of us who are liberated from something, which is all of us, remember all that God has done for us. And, come back to God giving God thanks. Live differently. Then we shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord our God has given to us and to our house. Amen.