

# Jesus frees us from slaves to sin

Message for Sunday, February 11, 2018  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Exodus 3-5

## Children's Message:

I want to talk with you today about hope. Hope is always in the future. When something is wrong, we hope it will get better. When you're sick, you look forward to feeling well again. Hope is always about the future. If you have a dollar in your hand—*show one in my hand*—you don't say, "I hope that I have a dollar." You already have it!

We just heard the Bible passage about the people of Israel living as slaves in Egypt. Can you tell what it means to be a slave? *Listen to the answers.* The people of Israel were hoping that God would save them. They cried out in prayer, because they were afraid that God had forgotten them. They almost lost their hope. Then God told them help was coming! God was sending Moses, who would tell the king of Egypt to let all the slaves go free. How happy they were to hear the good news!

This is how it is with God's love: the best is still coming! We still have something to hope for.

**Message:** "Jesus frees us from slaves to sin"

## 1) Introduction to the Service

This worship service is about slavery. It's also about how God can help people who are slaves to obtain freedom.

The Scriptures tell the story of the people of Israel when they were slaves, and how God helped them.

The songs chosen for today were created by and sung by the Black slaves of the United States in the 1700 and 1800s. They tell how they put their faith in Jesus Christ, even under terrible conditions.

Negro Spirituals and the Blues are both sorrowful, looking for better times. The Blues are the statement of an individual; a Spiritual is a statement of faith of a community.

All of these things happened hundreds of years ago. What about us today? Well, people today still find themselves trapped. Some are hooked on alcohol; others are prisoners of pride; many of us are caught

up in the materialism and greed of this world. We need help. As we hear how other people put their trust in God, I pray we will learn to do the same.

## Bible Reading: Exodus 1:8-14

The slaves in the USA saw themselves in the events of the Bible. God was real to them, because they were also suffering as slaves. Still today you can travel to many countries around the world and find people who live as slaves. Yes, even in Canada! Where people suffer oppression, they identify with the people of the Bible.

What about us here at St. Paul's Church? Do we suffer from oppression? Rather, I heard one person say the greatest danger to the church in the western world is not oppression, not persecution, but seduction. It's so easy to fall into the trap of materialism.

Some people will quite truly drag themselves and their families through agony and anxiety in their slavery. Ask anyone who is married to, or a child of, an alcoholic.

*Fortune* magazine once published a study which found that the most successful businessmen in America are also the worst fathers. They are so tied up—enslaved!—in their work that they have no time or energy left for their families.

## Bible Reading: Exodus 3:1-9

Why do young people commit suicide? Everyone is different, but in many cases, this is what we find:

They think that no one listens to them, or understands them.

They think that no one cares about them;

They think that there is no future for them.

Have you ever felt that way? Perhaps you feel that way now? One of the major problems of our society is that we have an abundance of acquaintances, but a scarcity of friends. Do you have many friends?

Now, when I say "friend", I mean someone you can tell your secrets to. Ross Hamilton, my professor of Pastoral Care, told us that most people are lucky if they have two or three close friends through their whole life!

This is exactly the way that the people of Israel must have felt. They had cried out to God, but there was no answer. It appeared that God did not care for them after all, no matter what they had been taught as children. And certainly the Egyptians around did not love them. Their future held only more suffering.

Then came Good News!

- ) God does listen to them
- ) God does care. About them
- ) God does have a plan for their future.

In fact, God is sending them a personal message of hope.

What do you pray for?

What do you need in your life that is missing right now?

What Good News do you need to hear from God?

People tell me their two biggest troubles are:

- ) not enough time to do all the things they want (especially not enough time with family and friends)
- ) not enough money to have all the things they want.

In a moment, we'll pray. I invite you to prepare to open yourself up to God. Tell God what is in your heart and on your mind. The Bible tells us that God listens and cares. Let's believe God's word.

### **Bible Reading: Exodus 3:10-14**

God sent Moses on a mission to save his people. But God also makes a promise to Moses: "I will be with you."

Moses dares to ask questions of the Almighty. "What if they don't accept me?" God answers with the statement that no one dares to question: "I AM WHO I AM". God provides the unshakeable rock upon which our faith is established. This is the faith and hope which brought Israel out of slavery.

Jesus came into the world, and he also said, "I AM." This is the message of the Gospel: that God loved you and me so much that he came into this world in person. It was no longer enough to send a messenger. Jesus is God himself come to be our

Saviour.

Jesus asked the disciples, "Whom do you say that I am?" What is your answer to Jesus? Who do you say that he is?

- ) A great man?
- ) A wise teacher?
- ) An innocent victim of religious intolerance?
- ) Or is he God, who alone has the power to save? And if he is, what have you done about it?

### **Bible Reading: Exodus 4:29 - 5:1**

Moses went with his brother Aaron to tell the people of Israel God's message. He probably went with hope, but also with fear. Would they believe him?

Yes, they did! This was an act of faith on their part. It was the beginning of their freedom from slavery.

Without that initial decision to trust God, and put their lives in God's hands, they would have remained as slaves forever. Certainly it is God who brought them out of Egypt. But God cannot work with unwilling, uninterested people.

It's the same in your life. God can do nothing in your life if you are not interested in him—if you are unwilling to obey and follow him.

In order for God to do anything in your life, you need to make a decision. No one else can make it for you.

Sometimes people say they go to the United Church or the Anglican Church because their parents baptized them there. That may be true. But merely going to church doesn't mean you've made a decision to trust your life to God in Jesus Christ. Your parents can't make that decision for you. Only you can. Have you? Will you?

### **Bible Reading: Joshua 3:14-17**

Finally, they reach the promised land! They cross over the Jordan River, and they are home. It's the end of one stage of life, and the beginning of another.

That's how it is when you commit your life to Jesus

Christ. It's the end of one stage of your life, and the beginning of a new one. He calls you to change your values. He calls you to spend your time and your money differently than how you used to. He calls you to treat other people differently.

Your faith must be lived out in all your life. Some people make the tragic mistake of believing that their faith affects only their relationship with God, and it comes into affect only after they die when they go to heaven.

No! Jesus calls us to follow him here and now. One example of this was the leader of the Black civil rights movement in the United States, Martin Luther King, Jr.

He believed Jesus called him to stand up for freedom and justice and equality for people of all colours. He answered the call. He lived out his faith. He paid dearly for it: attacked by police dogs, beaten and whipped, thrown in jail, and finally murdered. But he never wavered in his response to God's call.

### **Introduce Hymn "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot"**

This last hymn, judging by the words, is purely about heaven. It seems to be saying, "I will live out my faith when I get to heaven."

But there's a surprise to this negro spiritual, which the black slaves of the United States used to sing. When the slaves were finished the day's work, they would often sit around a fire singing and praying.

A few of them would be talking quietly to one side, planning an escape north to freedom in Canada. When the plans were ready, they needed some way to let others know who might want to join them. But they needed to do it secretly, without letting the white owners know their plans.

"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" was often sung during a service or campfire as a signal to run away that night!

The Israelite slaves and the black slaves had faith in God to help them. God gave them hope. This faith and hope was not just for heaven, but for here and now. It helped them to fight against oppression and

injustice. It gave them courage to fight for freedom.

God cannot do anything with someone who is not interested, or is unwilling. But if you are willing to follow him, there is help and hope for you, too.

### **Hymn: "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot"**

#### **Closing prayer**

Look up at the cross. See Jesus hanging there. Suffering. Held down with nails. On his own, helpless. Yet, because he is not alone, he is victorious.

Look down at yourself. See your life. Tied down with demands and desires which try to control you. On your own, helpless. Yet, you are not alone. Jesus can break the bonds of your slavery, and set you free.

Let us go now in peace and love.