

July 5th, 2020

Reclaiming Liberation

Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

What a week, what a week, what a week! I'm sure Jesse can testify to that as well. Sometimes it just seems like life feels overwhelming, confining, and exhausting, doesn't it? Sometimes, don't you just wish there was an escape? There is.

It seems like every generation has its grumblings for the generation before it and after it. In versus 16 and 17 of today's reading Jesus laments: "But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.' Now I'm not saying that Jesus was calling out an "OK Boomer" or a "those dang kids" for his time. Rather he compares some folks of all ages to these 'children' in the market places. Understand that a town's market place in those days was like a plaza or public forum and not just some shopping mall of the times. In this comparison these "children" are calling out "we played the flute for you and you didn't dance," etc.

Well why should I? This mentality sets up a form of societal entitlement. The logic goes because someone starts playing a flute we are somehow obligated to dance to it. Pied piper much? Or because someone on the other side of the country is outraged by something you're also obligated to be outraged. What if you don't feel like dancing, don't feel outraged. This mentality forms the core of modern advertising. "I have the new iPhone 15-Z, why don't you?" It is nothing more or less than a call to submit to the ways of the world. A call to conformity.

Now in versus 18 and 19 we're given a different conundrum. So John, the Baptist, you know, the guy that's proclaiming the messiah and baptizing folks? Well he comes around and he's 'neither eating nor drinking.' What is the judgement of the people? "They say, 'He has a demon.' Okay. Alright. So here comes Jesus, the Son of Man, and he's 'eating and drinking.' So what's the judgement this time? "They say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Now if you are sitting comfortably at home, or somewhere else that nice and relaxing your brain might just be going [unintelligible noises.] Pot? Kettle? Double standard much?

The mores and standards of the world are mutable and changing. Often based on who you are and what you look like. If you're a Pastor, Executive Director, other form of public leader, or a marginalized person you don't get to have an entirely private life. You can't go out, have a chili dog, and fart without someone being offended and attributing it to your group or whatnot. A homeless person has a more difficult time walking into a restaurant to eat and pay for a meal. 'They'll cause problems.' Black people are more dangerous. So what can you do? Not much; this is a call to uncertainty.

In the second half of the passage this morning we read Jesus giving thanks, or praise, to his Father for hiding "these things" from the wise and intelligent, and instead revealing them to infants. First, "these things" refer to the fact that the cities where most of Jesus' miracles or "deeds of power" were done chose not to repent and follow him. Why give thanks for something so important to be known by children and not wise people. Jesus isn't calling for people to be deliberately stupid, but he does seem to have *some* issue with wisdom and intelligence. Is this why the Father is only known by the Son and those who the Son chooses to reveal him to? Have we, even back over 2000 years ago, been so wrapped up in intellect and arrogance that Jesus would rather only children know? Do the ways of the world call us to wrap our head up in complications to the point that faith becomes clouded?

Scripture gives us the answer to these three problems. Liberation. Liberation comes from the word liberty. Liberty is the state of *being* free from oppression or responsibility; liberation is the state of *being* freed from oppression or responsibility. Liberation is the greatest gift of God and Jesus.

In contrast to the ways of the world the kingdom of God doesn't care why you don't dance to the flute. There is no judgement if you don't have the new iPhone 15-Z. By the way... there is no iPhone 15-Z yet. Just in case you were worried you're behind the times. There is no guilty verdict from the kingdom of God about not being outraged like the man back east. Not even if you heart chuckles a little in glee instead.

Worldly standards and mores change, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. Depends on who's in power, who's making policy. Thankfully we are liberated for our policy maker is Jesus. He gave us our laws: Love thy God and Love thy neighbor.

And it doesn't matter how smart or book learned someone is. God's kingdom doesn't do IQ screenings for entrance exams! Indeed, throughout the Gospels Jesus lifts up and praises uneducated children. 'Let them come to me.' I would never say that science or technology could or would replace faith. Sometimes they bolster and facilitate sharing our faith. But they do get in the way sometimes. As humans it is easier to believe in facts that we can test and prove to ourselves, or facts the reputable scientific community has validated. Yet with all our facts, science, and technology we can't explain the soul. We can't explain how, even to this day, that miracles can, and do, still occur. Faith is often easier to accept from a childlike perspective.

I have a tendency to overthink things. In the Gallup Strengths Finder 2.0 one of my strengths is Intellection. All of my strengths are firmly rooted in the Strategic and Analysis domains. Doesn't really shock anyone. I would be the Doubting Thomas, yet we are called to that childlike faith.

Our liberation, that state of being freed, comes from surrendering ourselves to God and Jesus. Psalm 46:10 reads: "Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth." Even Jesus on the cross surrenders to his Father's will. Luke 22:42 "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." While it can seem paradoxical that surrender to God's will is our liberation. This can be a difficult choice to make. Not only is it difficult having to discern what God's will is and then follow it, but sometimes the hardest thing is to simply "be still, and know that I am God."

We are given a promise in our surrender, our liberation. In the beginning I asked wouldn't it be nice if there was an escape from the overwhelming, confining, and exhausting existence we're in right now. There is.

In the last verse in our reading this morning Jesus teaches us how it works. He promises the weary, shoulders weighed down with heavy burdens, to come to him. "Come to me and I will give you rest." Doesn't say that the burden isn't having the latest phone, not knowing what the current mask wearing policies are, or even if that blasted, stiff necked budget or equation refuses to resolve themselves out. "Come to me and I will give you rest." Jesus continues "take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

What an amazing thing! The ways of the world would work us sick and overwhelm us with worry about the way we should be. Rather Jesus and God invite

us to surrender, be liberated under an easy yoke. It is a choice we make day to day, minute to minute. It is one I find great solace in surrendering for my liberation. I hope you all remember to take a break once in a while to “be still, and know that I am God.”