

Freedom

Our chapter this week is on "freedom" and in it McLaren summarized the first part of the Moses story beautifully. Some of you don't know the Moses story very well. Maybe you think you do because you've seen DreamWork's "Prince of Egypt" or if you're older, maybe you've been informed about Moses through Charleston Heston's version of in "The 10 Commandments."

Whatever you think you know about Moses, McLaren's summary in the "Freedom" chapter is worth reading. The Moses story is the core of scripture, both in the new and old Testaments. It tells us unapologetically that God is always on the side of the slaves and never the slave owners. Always on the side of the oppressed and never on the side of the oppressors. Always on the side of the marginalized and never on the side of those who exclude with their power. God is always on the side of the one who is in bondage because God's greatest desire is that we are all free, free to live and love in the way our Creator intended.

The Moses story is and was so central to scripture that a very important ritual was birthed. It was the ritual of Passover. The Passover Seder meal is an annual celebration of the story of Moses and God's liberating nature. Some have taken this story to be literal and only literal, but others have found deeper meaning in that story when it's seen as a metaphor. Jesus was one of those people who saw this story not only as a historical one but also a metaphorical one.

Jesus' last supper was a Passover Seder. It was an important holiday meal where people were reminded that God sides with the oppressed, with the broken, with the marginalized. It was a meal that pointed to the liberating nature of the Divine. It was a meal that invited the participants to let go of the things that held them in bondage and embrace a new freedom, and that freedom is the freedom to love our neighbors and to love ourselves to the degree that God love us, and of course to love God because God loved us first.

During the last supper, this last Passover meal that Jesus enjoyed with his friends, the last time he remembered the Moses story, he told them, "Don't let this be a once a year affair. And don't let this be a once a month or even twice a month reminder. Instead, whenever you eat, whenever you drink, (which hopefully is more than once a day) try to remember what Moses and I taught you about God's liberating nature. Try to remember that you don't have to live in bondage. You don't have to be a player in the world's

kingdoms, but you can be a player in God's kingdom." Essentially, that was Jesus' message.

The other scripture that McLaren points to in this "Freedom" chapter is Paul's letter to the Galatians and it is the scripture I shared with you just a few minutes ago. He says, "It is for the purpose of your freedom that Christ has set us free. You were created to be free, free to love your neighbors, free to love yourself and free to love God."

But the scripture that McLaren doesn't include, which I think is surprising, goes on to explain what it looks like to be in bondage and what it looks like to be free. So, let's take a minute to look specifically at what keeps us in bondage. What keeps us from being at peace with ourselves and the world. What keeps us from experiencing true divine joy? What prohibits our ability to love ALL our neighbors? What gets in our way to truly and fully trust God.

Let's start with fear. How does fear have its grip on you? What do you fear? Do you fear our political reality? "Oh Lord, if my guy/gal doesn't win on November 6th what will happen to us?" Do you fear our economic reality? "Lord, what's going to happen to my retirement? How am I going to pay my bills?" Do you fear our religious reality? "God, what if those people persuade others to think the way they do. What will happen to our communities?" Lloyd Ogilvie in his book, "Facing the Future without Fear" said there are 366 "Fear nots" in the Bible, one for every day of the year, including Leap Year! God doesn't want us to go a single day in fear! Why? Because fear holds us in bondage and that bondage keeps us from truly loving one another, loving one another in a way that we were intended to love our neighbor and ourselves.

OK, so maybe you're one of those rare people who are not afraid. What else do we need to be liberated from? Addiction of course is a no-brainer, but addiction doesn't end with drugs and alcohol. We can be addicted to all sorts of things that affect our well-being. Lately, I'm fighting another addiction, an addiction that most of my friends, family, colleagues and peers also are fighting – it's an addiction to the news. Do any of you fall into that category? How much news do you watch? How much "pseudo-news" do you get from Facebook or other social media? How many of you have a news app on your phone? How many of you listen to the news in your car? We can be taken hostage by the news of the day. Some of us can't seem to get enough of it, even though all the news we hear is bad, we still can't get enough of all that bad news.

Other addictions besides our addiction to drugs or alcohol or the news may include food addictions, sex addictions, gambling addictions, and so on.

Whatever we do that we can't seem to get enough of is an addiction of some sort and if we can't get enough of something, then that something has us in bondage and we are not free.

What else holds us in bondage? How about our thoughts? How many of us have absorbed perspectives of ourselves that were given to us as children and we carry into today. Some of us think we're stupid and we can't seem to break free from that perception. Some of us think we're fat, and even if we're a woman's size four, we can't break free from the perception that we have a weight problem. Some of us think that we're not worthy of love. Some of us have adopted an identity that keeps us from being all we can be. That identity that the world defines for us – that holds us hostage. But our identity as God defines us – that is liberating.

There are an infinite number of ways where we find ourselves in bondage, but really there is only one way to free ourselves from that bondage and it is the lesson that both Moses and Jesus taught their disciples: Let Go and Let God. That's it. That's what freedom looks like. Let Go and Let God.

Our communion is at a table, not an altar and we are invited to join God in his liberating nature and become liberators ourselves. We are empowered to not only overcome our own bondage but we can find ways to liberate others. It may be a literal liberation, like freeing the Latin American children from camps. It may be an emotional liberation, helping others release themselves from the bondage their thoughts put them in. Or it could be a spiritual bondage, where people do not know the freedom that comes from Divine Love.

But here's the thing: whenever you remember to Let Go and Let God, you become the body and life of Christ and not only are you free from this world and all its snags and snares, but you become a liberating force in bringing God's kingdom into this world. May it be so for you and may it be so for me.