

Third Sunday after Pentecost, Year C
The Rev. George Arceneaux
St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, Wisconsin
June 26, 2022

Galatians 5:1,13-25 | Curry, Michael. "[Statement on Supreme Court Dobbs decision by Presiding Bishop Michael Curry](#)." Episcopal Church:Office of Public Affairs. June 24,2022.

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again therefore to a yoke of slavery.

The words from Paul call to mind the chains of slavery historically and presently known in the nations of the world. They may conjure imagery of not only the slaves held captive in chains in Rome and Jerusalem during Paul's time but those too from our history. Paul may call to mind our world now, where so many work in unfulfilling, demanding jobs in order to earn not enough for the life sought to be lived. Slavery in the world is continually evolving yet always real; brutally efficient in dehumanizing us all; those with power and those without such that the master of the world seems to be the world itself.

Taken at its face value, Paul's words might be almost offensive; slavery has happened, slavery is happening, how on earth can Paul justify himself in saying that Jesus has set us free?

At the risk of changing my tone too drastically, the story that has come to mind which has helped me consider Paul's meaning has arisen from my memory of the summer of 2008. At the time, I was just out of my freshman year of college and back in my hometown of Lafayette, Louisiana. I sported an increasingly thin curly almost afro as my dreams of hair circled the drain when I took a job at Southside Papa John's Pizza chain as a delivery boy. I drove the family mini-van, a 2001 Honda Odyssey which I had inherited as my first car, the heartiest, best vehicle I have ever owned despite its failing air-conditioner so dearly missed in that Southern Louisiana summer delivering pizzas.

Somehow, I had managed to land a job as the only seasonal pizza delivery guy, everyone else there was a pro. There was Joe in his late 20s who spent all his money on his suped-up sedan to go drag racing, Jeff who was a 50-year-old stoner with a heart of gold, and Frank the manager, a mammoth of a man who may have been the best boss I've ever had. Don't tell Ian. These folks had worked for years, a couple for over a decade, and at the risk of valorizing them too much, they were good people. Then of course there was Fred. Fred was in his early 40s and was the guy who showed me the ropes more than anybody. He told me what the best routes were, saved me good fares with regulars who tipped well, and had a keen sense of humor. It's Fred who I think of as I'm considering Paul and Jesus' emancipation of us from slavery. One day after a few deliveries I found myself in the back next to the freezer chopping bell peppers and doing my best to avoid my profoundly un-air-conditioned car when Fred hurried, in a huff into the back. And he exclaimed, "George, someone's vandalized your car!"

Now before I continue, there's something I forgot to mention about that Honda Odyssey I drove. The back was plastered in bumper stickers. And I'll remind you that the year was 2008, and at the time there was a pretty significant presidential election underway. And one of my bumper stickers on the back was in support of a particular candidate who was not terribly well looked upon by much of the south Louisiana population.

So Fred hurried into the back, shouting, "George, someone's vandalized your car! They put a bumper sticker on the back with that guy running for president's name! Don't worry though, I ripped it off and tossed it into the garbage, so you're good."

I was a little shocked, and then a little terrified as I admitted, "Fred, I put that bumper sticker on my car."

While the whole encounter up to that point felt ludicrous, what ensued was a political conversation that has haunted me as an example of the way in which the world enslaves so many to bend its ways. Fred began spouting his own talking points received from the news sources he frequented as I did the same, each of us talking less from a sense of who we were but rather from the ideologies we held that deafened our ability to see and hear each other. That is until Fred finally said to me, "George. I'm scared. I don't understand why the world is the way it is. You're a nice kid and I want you to have a better life than I've had." It was a moment that felt true and kind, so different from the venial argument we'd been having and so strangely profound in the back room of a Papa John's both of us covered in flour and sweat from the day's work. I've thought of it now in light of Paul as an instance of Christ's freedom that freed Fred to sincere and powerful vulnerability that humbled me into feeling loved.

We all may find ourselves subject to the enslaving realities of the world. For myself and Fred, we were certainly slaves to the political ideologies which we had acculturated. But we may be enslaved to bad habits, addictions, toxic relationships, beliefs of ourselves. While I fear this may be the case for our nation, I'll stick in my personal experience, I fear we may be tempted towards enslavement to simple judgments as the protections provided by Roe V. Wade were overturned this week. To simplify others into categories of pro-choice and pro-life when the complexities and feelings surrounding pregnancy, abortion, and reproductive rights are so deep. For my part, I stand with The Episcopal Church writ large in opposition to the Supreme Court's decision though hope to be a true and loving conversation partner with others regardless of belief on the subject.

The enslavement Paul speaks of, I think, is to a belief that there is anything more significant, powerful, or true than the Gospel. The freedom Christ offers is the reality that nothing is greater than God and no law greater than loving God as we love our neighbors. It is the freedom to remember the power of the Gospel and be compelled by it such that we are not only freed from the slavery of our minds and spirits but that in being so we are moved to work to break the physical chains of this world which oppress and disempower.

Remember that you are free; that though you may feel the weight of chains which shackle mind, body, spirit or heart, our God is one who breaks chains. Remember that Christ calls you to freedom.