

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

April of 2014--I believe it was the 18th, Becky and I went skydiving. It was exhilarating. The sights from up there are indescribable, as everything below you looks like a miniature playset. The fields an earthy quilt covering your floor and on top of it are playmobile houses, cars tinier than ants, and if you look up, the horizon stretches on forever, curving like a beachball. It's enough to forget for a second that you're trapped, strapped to an instructor who is responsible for pulling your lifeline, which will most likely deploy.

For me, the scarier part, though, was the ride up. In the tiniest plane I've ever been in in my life. Sitting on the floor, your instructor essentially your big spoon as you rise in elevation, seeing the ground turn from your everyday reality into the quilt and playset I described a moment ago. But this ascension lasted longer than the freefall. It had more rickety parts that I could hear squeaking, and it felt as though there were a lot more variables that could go wrong. The engine could die, the wings could fall off; gravity could cease to exist. I don't know. It wasn't terribly rational, but I was scared.

This is about as close as I can comprehend to what it means to be trapped, or imprisoned. But I chose to do this. If something went wrong, it was partially my fault for giving them my credit card.

I can't even imagine what it would be like to live in a wartorn country with soldiers walking by at all times. I can't imagine what it was like to be black in America over the past centuries. I can't imagine what it feels like to be taken hostage. All I know is that freedom would be on my mind. How can I get out? Is someone coming to save me? Can this be over and we go back to "normal"? In these moments, the desire to get out is there, but it's heightened. And certainly Jesus cares about people who fear for their lives because they've been tied up in a shed in the woods.

But He also cares for people who are trapped by a lot less. For those chained to their homes because their legs are losing strength and cease to confidently move them out into the

world and home again. Or people who once loved reading and carpentry yet due to aging eyes find themselves unable to perform what once seemed natural to them. Or there are those who have lost loved ones and the outside world seems too busy, too happy, too much of a reminder of who has been lost, so they are confined to their homes in the hopes that emotions won't flair up too much. Those in dead end jobs which don't quite pay enough for the family, or those in relationships that are getting harder to share love in, or people who have moved to a new city and can't find a community so they are isolated: alone. Jesus cares about these people, trapped in the everyday situations of life, too.

These are the people, I would imagine, to whom Jesus is speaking in the synagogue in our lesson today. Those who are trapped by the situations in life that hinder them from living, whether it's illness or erratic emotions, maybe demonic possession or fear or shame. These are the people to whom Jesus preaches "you know that freedom that you've always heard would come? It's here, gang. You're looking at Him."

So real people, with real problems, stare. Waiting. Is what we've heard true, the whisperings from other towns? Did *our* Jesus, Mary and Joseph's kid actually perform miracles? I think they waited so long, mouth agape and a little saliva dripping down some faces that Jesus continued, "surely you're going to say Physician heal yourself!" And it's important to realize that they aren't simply telling Him to take care of Himself, but His own. Care for the people He grew up with and learned from, the people who fed Him around the dinner table and recited the Psalms with. If He was the one to bring freedom, and if the rumours are true, why isn't He getting to work in His own neighbourhood?

But He realizes that they've missed it. In their waiting, they're looking for great signs, like the ones done elsewhere, but what Jesus preached was "the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Not that it was about to happen. Not even that it was happening. The preaching of the freedom from Isaiah, placed onto the person of Christ, is the freedom that they were to look for,

to grasp a hold of, to find great comfort in all their days, but their ears didn't catch that so they were looking for something more.

Signs are great. But when sight is restored, it points to the restoration of spiritual sight (especially in Luke's Gospel). When people are healed, it points beyond the physical healing to the full healing that is already occurring and will someday be certain by sight. Even when the dead are raised, it's fantastic! But it's not the point. The point is that there is going to be a resurrection for absolutely everyone and to those who heed the Word of Christ and trusts in the freedom He has come with, it is an eternal resurrection to life.

But it's so easy to gloss over what is already here in the hopes that something greater might happen. It's so easy to be dissatisfied with the freedom that we receive in the absolution, in the Word, in the Holy Eucharist, to want something here and now that goes beyond what we cling to by faith. But here, we receive freedom in Christ, freedom from the Law. No longer is it our task master, placing chains of perfection on our back that we can never attain to, and threatening the worst punishments which we rightly deserve, our illness and separation, the death that looms ever in the future, the wrath of God which would supply all these terrors to us if it weren't for the preaching of Christ, in His Words and actions, back then and today. The Law cannot point to our sin and say we deserve death, and no longer can any situation we find ourselves dictate what kind of attitude God has towards us.

We have freedom from the ruling Law and instead we are welcomed into the kingdom of Christ, where we are free in Him, loved by Him, whether we are resting in bed at home or in the midst of terrible conflict.

No longer must we slave in order to provide for ourselves, but we may trust. Trust that He is our Lord and He is caring for our most basic needs and our most intense situations. Sure, we continue to live life, working and seeking help, but we realize that all the good we receive, food, healthcare, family and friends, they didn't come from our hard work but from God's care. In all situations we can hope because even if we don't get the freedom that we are looking for, a

freedom tangible and exciting today, we are still free in Christ; we can trust in Him and have the peace that passes all understanding and exists in every situation. He still loves us even if we can't see it today.

For as Luther wrote in the Large Catechism:

“When we were created by God the Father and had received from Him all kinds of good things, the devil came and led us into disobedience, sin, death, and all misfortune. As a result, we lay under God’s wrath and displeasure, sentenced to eternal damnation, as we had merited and deserved it. There was no counsel, no help, no comfort for us until this only and eternal Son of God, in His unfathomable goodness, had mercy on us because of our misery and distress and came from heaven to help us. Those tyrants and jailers have now been routed, and their placed has been taken by Jesus Christ, the Lord of life, righteousness, and every good and blessing. He has snatched us, poor lost creatures, from the jaws of hell, won us, made us free, and restored to us the Father’s favour and grace. As His own possession He has taken us under His protection and shelter, in order that He may rule us by His righteousness, wisdom, power, life, and blessedness.” LC II.28-30

Now, sometimes we're like Becky and myself, and we like to strap an instructor and a parachute on our backs and climb out from under His shelter and rule. We like to pick up the very captors which Christ has freed us from. We become dissatisfied with the total freedom we have--from death and sin and the law; essentially freedom from needing to serve and satisfy and work for ourselves--and therefore we serve them again. Whenever we think we must accomplish this great task in order for God to be happy with us, whether that be raising kids right or making a huge impact on a mission trip or with a friend. And whenever we are overly dissatisfied with our situation in life, maybe health or wealth wise, or socially, whenever we make too much of this, we are a slave to our own desires and we demand that we and God serve these captors (and we get royally frustrated when these perceived needs are not met). I'm

not saying you aren't allowed to be concerned about your situation--that is entirely fine. The issue is when we make an idol out of it and would do anything to fix it.

Whenever we decide to not be as free as Christ has made us, it's like we've put a parachute on our back, but this parachute isn't going to deploy. The captor that we're trusting to bring us safety or satisfaction is only going to fail. Those who listened to Jesus had made a little parachute out of the miracles they hoped He would perform, a safety net out of the new lives they were hoping to receive, and Jesus knew that at best they'd satisfy for a short while and they wouldn't directly lead to eternal satiation.

But in reality, the reason we put on such captors even after they've been taken off is because it appears that we're in a free fall anyways. Death is coming and our days are filled with struggles, so picking up a crutch or a distraction is only natural. But in the midst of the free fall, we have been met by Christ. He has shouted over the raging winds in your ears that He is LORD over all and has already defeated that crash and its debilitating consequences that exist at the bottom, when the soft earthy quilt gets close and does not soften your fall. His lifetime ended abruptly as He hung on the cross, His God and Father, whom He is one with, didn't catch Him right before contact was made or even cushion the blow. Christ's breath left His body, His Spirit too. Though not one bone was broken, He was most certainly dead. But in rising from such a death He proved that death would not be the victor.

It could no longer demand the respect that it once had, neither could sickness and pain and separation which all lead to or stem from death. Not even sin and the Law, which once were quite clear that death was our deserved lot in this life, could claim a hold on us. No, as we are free falling, we have a LORD who reminds us what He has been through so that He can proclaim His freedom, His protection, to us all our days. We do not need to serve another lord to protect us. He is precisely what we need, and He is here for us.

This is the freedom which Jesus proclaimed in the synagogue in His hometown. This is the freedom He enacted on the cross. This is the freedom that was revealed in His resurrection.

This is the freedom, the ensnaring of death and the devil, and the pouring out of righteousness and life that was given to you in the Water and the Word, the freedom you recall each time your baptism crosses your mind. This is the freedom that Jesus preaches to you in His Words with bread and wine, that His Lordship may be enacted time and time again over you when you receive His true body and blood.

This is what it means to have Christ as Lord. Not that such a confession is the key to His grace and affection, but it states that we believe what He says is true, what He does is certain.

So when I stand at the front and forgive your sins in the name of our triune God, it is just as if Jesus is preaching that this prophecy from Isaiah is being fulfilled today. For every proclamation of Gospel that He spoke, that He lived in His life and every syllable of Gospel which continues to be uttered unto the end of history, they truly bring good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, and sight to the blind; today, He has brought all that to you. Even as you free fall, He is with you and a devastating crash into the earth will not be your end.

Amen.