

## PORT ANGELES UMC SERMON

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What is Liberation?

- Good morning Church, Thank you for the opportunity
- Thank you Pastor Tom, the Lamb-Gunnerson family and everyone for the warmest welcome

### Galatians 3:23-29    God's Children through Faith

23 Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed.

24 Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. 25 And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.

26 For you are all children[a] of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes.[b] 28 There is no longer Jew or Gentile,[c] slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children[d] of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

Growing up in suburban Louisiana relatively recently, Jesus was emphasized as the Savior primarily. He was the one who saved us from our sin with his blood, suffering, and perseverance culminating in his own passion, ending with the sacrifice of all sacrifices. Jesus symbolizes eternal life in heaven as opposed to eternal life in flames. Thus, I had gotten in the habit of primarily associating Jesus with DEATH and RESURRECTION.

Traditionally, Jesus has been associated with death so much so, that WHAT Jesus embodied during his life is often an afterthought and secondary. When I journey through the gospel I am reminded over and over again that Jesus embodied justice and liberation.

What is liberation? We don't talk about it a lot so it's natural to have a few questions right?

Liberation is my favorite aspect of the divine in our Christian theology and I believe it is very underrated and rarely explored. Liberation.

Let me explain why it's the most important to me. I am a descendent of enslaved African people. They were treated as chattel, property, less than human. Thus, when my ancestors were made believers (some volunteered and many others violently forced) they had a slightly different interpretation of scripture than their masters.

When they heard about liberation, they weren't thinking spiritually. So when they read in the bible, that God was on the side of the oppressed, they believed that God was on their side. Talk about a literal interpretation.

Justice and Liberation were the primary motivation for crying out God's name. The only thing more important than a savior that would liberate them spiritually enabling them to have a pleasant afterlife was a savior that would liberate them IN SLAVERY! In the HERE and NOW! A savior to provide a meal, keep their daughter from being taken advantage of, or keep your husband from being sold. I'm talking about an active God. A God who moves when you cry out- A God who hears your pain. Black theology is liberation theology as liberation is a primary concept, even today. (later)

In Galatians "Being made CHILDREN OF GOD" equates to the act of being liberated. Liberated from the old covenant, the covenant of law, to the new covenant, the covenant of Jesus enabled Grace. Or from slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land like God did for the Israelites.

If Jesus is the one that performs or enables this action to happen – (the action of liberation), then Jesus is a liberator. . . among many other things!

James Cone - Father of Black Liberation Theology emphasizes that Jesus embodies Liberation and functions as a liberator. Thus, the church and its work is a natural extension of liberation. (It's our job to liberate.) I believe it is our calling to embody liberation- not just for ourselves though- within the world.

*“Any interpretation of the gospel in any historical period failing to see Jesus as the Liberator of the oppressed is heresy. Any view of the gospel failing to understand the church as that community whose work and consciousness are defined by the community of the oppressed is NOT Christian and is thus heretical.” – James Cone*

What is Liberation? Liberation is autonomy to come alive.

The freedom to bloom, express, dress. Liberation is, “Living your best life.” – Cardi B

Liberation feels like releasing all the baggage you've been carrying around in order to conform to society's expectations of you. When I connected with the essence of who I am and gave myself permission to live that out unapologetically - I was liberated.

In my experience, the more I began to liberate myself, the more I was able to appreciate other's liberation however it manifested. I'll be honest - Not all I understood, but recognized and appreciated- yes.

Luke 8:26-39 is a witness of Jesus functioning as a liberator-

<sup>35</sup> People rushed out to see what had happened. A crowd soon gathered around Jesus, and they saw the man who had been freed from the demons. He was sitting at Jesus' feet, fully clothed and perfectly sane, and they were all afraid.

Sometimes our “demons” can be energetic or spiritual— fear, bitterness, negative self-talk, self-doubt, self-hatred, jealousy, depression. I do not mean that depression is a demon or a spiritual issue at all. However, as someone who has struggled with depression most of my life, I have found that sometimes the fight with depression can last so long that it feels like you are struggling with demons.

Sometimes demons can manifest societally. For example, racism, sexism, and classism form a force in our country that has determined specifically the lives of most Black women whether they know it or not. What do your demons look like?

Jesus defines himself and his ministry early on in Chapter 4 of Luke “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for God has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free,”

I don’t know what you need to be liberated, or even what liberation looks like for you. I don’t know if you’ve been liberated five times before. Likewise, you may know what liberation for you looks like, but it might look different than mine. I think this makes the Kingdom of God even more diverse than one would have originally pictured. The diversity that I’m talking about can exist beyond the binaries of identity, gender, sexual orientation, theology, liturgy, culture, and the politics of our society.

Liberation isn’t always an event, although it can be, but a process. I emerged from my process transformed and it shocked everyone around me. However, I would like to point out that I am still actively in my process – because liberation is a lifelong process, I’m learning. Liberation is not always this drastic, but for me it was. I emerged from my process with a new world view and theology that challenged everything I had believed about God. This was extremely painful and traumatic.

And that is why I say, “Liberation is not free.” The most painful thing that can happen is WHEN you finally discover what liberates you only

to have it invalidated by other human beings or a society that privileges and values only select manifestations of liberation.

Jesus came to liberate. I encourage us to ponder these questions moving this week and beyond:

What does liberation look like?

What does being set free look like?

Liberation was important to my ancestors, and it is important to me. No, I am not enslaved in a society dominated by Colonialism, White Supremacy, Patriarchy. But I live in the result of it. WE live in the result of it. We live in a society that descended from such a society. Therefore Colonialism, White Supremacy, and Patriarchy still thrive here. Not as pronounced as in the past, but HERE nonetheless. I can tell you as a Black woman today- we still struggle for our liberation. Liberation to say what we truly feel without being labeled the “angry Black woman”, liberation to be successful, liberation to define our own success, wear our hair the way God created it, be as loud as we want to be, speak as much as we wanna speak, obviously I could go on and on.

The first amendment in the constitution guarantees the freedom of speech for all American citizens. Whether you know it or not, that does not apply to black and brown bodies. For a black or brown body, expression is often accompanied with extermination. We struggle to be seen as human beings, we struggle to matter. To simply matter, forget thrive! Black lives struggle to exist in predominantly white environments. We struggle to honor who we are when we are forced to inhabit white culture.

For myself and my community, liberation is an active concept. Thus, we need an active God. There are many aspects of God and I find beauty in every community’s ability to see another aspect. This is the true diversity of humanity. So I put before you this aspect embodied and valued by the African American community. Liberation. .... ASE (Yuruba for Amen). AMEN.