

Sunday, June 25, 2017 – Third Sunday after Pentecost
“Set Free”

Romans 6: 12-23

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV
Central Image – Single Focus

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

As our stuff ages, it seems to have a mind of its own. Take my phone. Every couple of years, like clockwork I start getting locked screens and frozen apps, sluggish performance – conveniently, it’s right about the time my carrier would have me want to buy a new phone. I find myself frustrated and even talking to my phone – “Stop it, why won’t you just let me make a call like you’re supposed to!” Maybe that sounds crazy but I know a lot of you do it too. It’s like it has a mind of its own. Stuff wears down, parts break, even our bodies don’t do what they used to do. Wouldn’t it be nice if things just worked the way they’re designed to work?

A whole different philosophy goes into how we live our lives. For some years now, a new most popular song has taken over at funerals. Anyone know what it is? **(snippet of Sinatra’s “My Way”)**

“For what is a man, what has he got?/If not himself, then he has naught/To say the things he truly feels and not the words of one who kneels/The record shows I took the blows and did it my way.”

Isn’t that the way things are? How dare someone tell you what to do? Get into your business about your time, your money, your interests, your relationships, your habits, your work. We want to celebrate freedom and standing up for yourself and being original and not letting anyone tell you what to do.

The problem is, doing things “My Way” offers nothing but a mirage, a false image dancing before us saying its ok for you to function any way you want, design and designer be cursed.

We've got choices over a lot of things in life, but not absolutely everything. A lot of you parents know the value in offering your kids choices. It's snack time. You offer them a choice between an apple and peanut butter or a banana with a little drizzle of honey. Either way, it's something good and healthy for their design and if they ask for ice cream instead, maybe some other day for a special treat but not now on an ordinary school day. Your kid may think you mean for refusing, they may kick and scream and cry and tell you they want it their way, parent be cursed but you hold your ground.

Everyone answers to someone. That's the point Paul is making to people in the church at Rome. The verse right before our text begins says, "Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

The root of sin – unholiness in what we think, say and do that drenches the very core of who we are is a self-centered pride that thinks doing things "my way" is better than what God has in store – creator be cursed. Sin doesn't start with a grand act of rebellion, it starts with a whisper. Why should God care what I do? Why do I need anyone's direction over my affairs, whose business is it to speak about my time, my money, my interests, my relationships, my habits, my work? I want freedom, I'm going to stand up for myself, be a real original – no one tells me what to do." And then the actual sins that we think, say and do come flooding out of us.

And here's the thing about that whisper – you're not in control over it. What feels and sounds and looks like freedom is just a mirage, a false image dancing before you enticing you toward "freedom" that is really a malfunction.

Oncologists talk about "free radicals" – atoms with an odd instead of an even number of electrons that interact with oxygen – in our biochemistry this is bad, because it causes malfunctions in our cells. These malfunctions start to cascade and the cells themselves malfunction, out of balance and out of control, not according to the design of our body but with a mind of their own. Enough of these grow and clump together and out of control, malfunctioning cells eventually grow into tumors. Some freedom, huh?

So too a “my way” kind of freedom – everyone answers to someone. Martin Luther talked about humans as being like a horse and rider. We’re the horse and the rider is in control. What feels and looks like “freedom” and “my way” is a mirage, it feels like we’re choosing for ourselves but an unholy trinity is really in control. Satan whispers his deceptive, deadly sweet nothings, “Did God really say ‘no?’” The world around us says, “Hey, everyone else is doing it, so why can’t we?” Our own corrupted human bodies even turn on us, “It would really feel good, so I will.” And here we think we’re doing it our way and meanwhile our malevolent rider is leading us sprinting toward a cliff to our destruction, happy to let us think we’re in control doing it our way.

Friends that’s not freedom, that’s slavery, and slavery of the worst kind at that – not even knowing we’re slaves.

Allow me a moment to correct a common misstatement I often hear – that God gave us free will. You and I are designed and created to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. When we’re functioning the way we’re supposed to, we operate the way we’re designed, and that means God’s in charge. Sure, we have choices – where to live, who to marry, what to make for breakfast in the morning, what to wear. And there are healthy boundaries around those choices, like a parent offering the apple and peanut butter or banana and honey. That’s operating the way you’re supposed to... but when you fight against it and do things “my way” it’s not freedom at work – it’s a malfunction, cascading out of control like a cancer and your malevolent master is riding you into pain and hardship. There’s no choice involved – you’re doing what the creator designed and allows, or you’re malfunctioning.

See, everyone answers to someone. You may not have a choice, but that doesn’t mean that you aren’t free. Being set free to sin doesn’t mean now I’m my own master. It means a new rider is in the saddle. The Holy Spirit comes in and promises us everything Jesus won for us on the cross – forgiveness and eternal life and help for living right today, wanting to do good and

God-pleasing things, changing out malfunctioning parts and building us back toward the way we were designed to be.

And that is true freedom – not free will to do things my way and choose my rider, but freedom is in the legitimate rider, the one who created us taking over and exerting control to fix His malfunctioning creature – to rip out the sin that leads to the cascading failures leading to pain and death and make us right again. And get this, you malfunctioning equipment, you saddled horse – the creator, the legitimate rider sets you free from sin so that He can take over, tinker inside you, fix you, reclaim you, to be obedient servants of righteousness and restore you in His image, the way you're supposed to be.

The next time you find yourself malfunctioning, wanting to go your own way, remember that God has set you free from that – not freedom to do whatever you want, but true freedom – Jesus won the gift of eternal life and gave you the Holy Spirit and with His help, you get fixed so you can function the way you were designed. You don't need to live that other way anymore. God has already chosen you to receive the gift of eternal life and His constant help to be more holy, living by His design – is always right there with you with His help and His Spirit.

In Jesus' name, Amen.