

**January 1, 2023, 1st SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS, SUNDAY SERVICE & SERMON
Pastor Tom Olson; Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran Church**

PRELUDE: Ruth Antal (Fuglebergs)

CALL TO WORSHIP: The First Noel vs. 2-4 read

HYMN #33 (vs. 1&3) "The First Noel"

CONFESSION OF SIN: Psalm 51:1-7 Have mercy on me. O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

CHILDREN'S SERMON: Getting strong, lifting weights and reading God's Word. *Luke 2:40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.*

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: *Isaiah 11:1-5*

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
2 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him--
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of power,
the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD--
3 and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.*

*He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
5 Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.*

GOSPEL LESSON: *Luke 2:33-40 The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."*

36 There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

READER: Here ends the reading of God's Word.

CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

CONFESSION OF FAITH: *I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, And of all things visible and invisible.*

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made; Who for us, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, And was made man; And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, He suffered and was buried; And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures, And ascended into heaven, And is seated on the right hand of the Father, And He shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, The Lord and Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, Who spoke by the Prophets. And I believe one holy Christian and apostolic Church, I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the Life of the world to come. Amen

GLORIA PATRI: Ambassador Hymnal p. 4 (please put on screen) *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER FOR OFFERING

HYMN #38 "Behold, a Branch is Growing"

**SERMON TITLE: "GET OUT OF JAIL FREE CARD"
Galatians 3:21-29; Pastor Tom Olson; January 1, 2023**

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

This is the time of year for change. Diet ads abound. I am trying a new diet myself that I have never tried, low carb, high fat, low sugar and lots of meat. I want to have six-pack abs by March! Time will tell. It is good so far, the less bread and cereal I eat, the clearer my breathing is and I am down two inches on my waistline in one month! Hopefully it will do more good than harm.

Some of you are resolving to exercise more and to get off of the couch. Some are resolving to read some good books or have daily devotion time with the Lord. Others don't even try because most resolutions don't last. But some do, and that makes it worth it.

Often times we have to go through a serious hardship to make us willing to get on a new and better path. Or as an old friend of mine (who died young) once told me, that he needed to be hit upside his head with a 2x4 to get him to listen to advice. We all struggle with parts of our lives that are bound to sin, or habits or foolishness or lack of information. Today we get some insights from our Epistle lesson that should help us with our New Year changes as we look at God's "Get Out of Jail Free" card in Galatians 3:21-29. Let's talk about it.

I. FREE FROM THE PRISON OF SIN

Galatians 3:21-22 Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. 22 But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

The Apostle Paul says that *“the whole world is a prisoner of sin.”* Our natural response to that is this, “We need to start obeying the law of God and stop sinning.” Have you ever tried to do that? I have. There are two results. Either I simply can’t obey the law and I keep on falling into sin. Or I scrounge up the will power to obey the law and then I get proud about how much better I am than other people who are sinning.

Paul tells us here what the issue is, he said that our efforts to be righteous would succeed if the law could impart life. But he explains that the law cannot impart life. A person who is in prison for stealing or murder cannot get out by simply saying that he now agrees with the law and that stealing and murder are wrong. No the law cannot save him once he has disobeyed the law. There is only one way he can be saved from punishment and that would be a pardon from the governor or the president. Nothing else can give him life.

The law is helpless to give life to the lawbreaker. The law is helpless to give us victory over sin, over habits, over foolish mistakes, over words carelessly spoken, over time wasted and opportunities lost. Only intervention from the King can set us free and enable us to have a new life.

He then tells us that the promises are realized through faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe. Jesus Christ is the champion who is bigger than our sin, our habits, our lack of understanding... The river of life flows from the cross of Christ to the throne of God in heaven and then to our hearts by the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

If you want power over sinful desires, evil power and the devil himself in 2023, there is only one place to get it. It comes from the Lord Jesus Christ and flows to us through the Word of God. That is why the devil attacks the Bible all the time. He knows that if he can keep people from reading the Bible and from receiving Christ in Holy Communion, that he can keep them from the new life and power they need to grow spiritually from glory to glory. Do you want to grow spiritually this year and walk in the victorious power of God? If so, get into the Word of God in the Bible and receive the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion. The power is in God, not in ourselves. It comes through faith. That is how we get FREE FROM THE PRISON OF SIN.

II. FREE FROM THE PRISON OF THE LAW

Galatians 3:23-25 Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. 24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

A living relationship with Christ makes you into a beautiful, loving person that is filled with the power and grace of God. But a legalistic religion based on the law can be an ugly thing. There has been more fighting and killing and division from legalistic religion than we can imagine. Just in one day alone in France, August 15, 1572, the church killed over 14,000 Bible-believing Huguenots in France because they wanted to believe and worship God according to the Bible rather than the man-made Roman Church institutional rules. That is the kind of ugly prison of legalism that you get when you have rules but no relationship with the King of Love, the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23.

What does your “religion” look like? Is it an angry pile of rules and regulations that you follow or else God will zap you? Or is it Psalm 23 where you invite people to the green pastures, the still waters and the restoring of the soul...where goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your life and you dwell in the house of the Lord forever?” Just the other day, Sharon and I drove by the bank in Cumberland, Wisconsin and thought of Hubert Thoe who worked there. I remember Hubert, a devout believer, saying that he didn’t like “CRABBY CHRISTIANITY.” He thought that born again people should demonstrated by a life of love and joy and kindness and not by pushing list of does and don’ts and being negative all the time. I remember Art Moe of Thief River Falls, Minnesota, reflecting on the harsh Christianity he knew as a child and he said in his

Norwegian accent, “If yoost got to be too many doos and don’ts.” The true faith is not a lifeless focus on the law but it is a lifegiving relationship with Jesus Christ who fulfilled the law for us and paid the full price for our redemption by “his holy and precious blood and his innocent sufferings and death so that we might be his own.”

Today in Holy Communion we receive his Holy and Precious Blood! Another name for communion is Eucharist, meaning thanksgiving. It is not a place to punish ourselves for sin, it is an experience to rejoice in God’s lavish forgiveness of our sins and our full adoption into His forever family.

I like the way the song puts it:

The mystery of the cross I cannot comprehend
The agonies of Calvary
You the perfect Holy One, crushed Your Son
Who drank the bitter cup reserved for me

By Your perfect sacrifice I've been brought near
Your enemy You've made Your friend
Pouring out the riches of Your glorious grace
Your mercy and Your kindness know no end

Your blood has washed away my sin
Jesus, thank You
The Father's wrath completely satisfied
Jesus, thank You
Once Your enemy, now seated at Your table
Jesus, thank You

III. FREE FROM BEING AN ILLEGAL ALIEN

Galatians 3:26-29 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Millions of people are pouring into America, the promised land, through our southern border. They want to leave their countries of crime, poverty and corruption and come here for a better life. But many of them have to first of all swim across the Rio Grande River.

Crossing the Rio, or the Red Sea or the Jordan are pictures of Holy Baptism. We start our walk with God by being baptized into Christ and putting on Christ. In some traditions you come to water baptism wearing dirty rags and leave wearing a white robe. Then we grow in the faith through the Word of God and get strength at the Lord’s table. Those who neglect preaching and Holy Communion often end up shipwrecked in their faith, starving to death spiritually. And then we end our life journey, sooner than you think...I have had three funerals in two weeks in my tiny ministry, but death for the believer is only the beginning of eternal life that cannot even be imagined. We are no longer aliens, but are citizens of our homeland, which is heaven.

The power of the Christian life is not the law. The law kills but the Spirit gives life. The law produces an angry, proud, legalistic religion and eventually death, but new life in Christ is where we find the power to live the victorious Christian life of joy and end up after our last breath, safe with the Savior in glory.

That is why Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, was born in the stable of Bethlehem. That is what we celebrate today at the Lord's table. We are loved, forever. Amen

Now may the peace of God that surpasses all human comprehension, guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen

HYMN #34 "Good Christian Friends, Rejoice"

HOLY COMMUNION (Dave Fischer prep and help)

CHORAL BENEDICTION: (10:30 AM-To the tune of Edelweiss) *May the Lord, Mighty Lord, Bless and keep you forever-- Grant you peace, Perfect peace, Strength in every endeavor. Lift up your eyes and see His face, Feel His grace forever. May the Lord, Mighty Lord, Bless and keep you forever. 9 AM Vagle CD#19*

POSTLUDE: Ruth Antal