

Set Free!
John 8:31-36
July 31, 2022 Pastor Pufahl

Are you free? Truly free?

Last week my family and I were on vacation. For part of the vacation, we took the kids to NYC. They are learning about 9/11, the Statue of Liberty, etc. in school. They wanted to see some of those sights. We took them. This was Jenny's and my second trip to NYC. I noticed a big change in the 12 years between each trip. These little devices people put into their ears. Everyone had them. On the subway, walking around the streets, even in the stores. People wore them. There were more of these than there were masks. But why? I know it is so they can listen to music or a podcast. But is there maybe more to it? Is it so that they can escape from the reality of the world a little bit and enter their own reality? If that is true, why?

Perhaps the one who stuck out the most to me was this man in the NYC bagel shop. Ear buds in place, only known to the workers as "order #37." There he sat, drinking his coffee, eating his bagel, listening to whatever came from those ear buds. No one sat with him. No one said anything to him. He was all alone, trying to escape from the reality of the world into his own reality.

Maybe it isn't him. Maybe it is the mom who is pushing the stroller with two children in it and another trying to keep up beside her. They are walking to the park to escape from the reality of their cramped apartment.

Perhaps it is the parent sitting in the hospital room, waiting to hear if the surgery of their little one went well or not.

Or perhaps it is you...sitting in this building, singing songs, watching your watch, wrangling your own kids.

It hit me. We all have our reality. We all share this reality from which we would also like to escape. If in fact we are trying to escape from the reality of the world into our own reality, then let me ask again: are we truly free?

I want us to go back in time, roughly 2,000 years. We have our lesson before us. Jesus is teaching a group of people. I can almost hear him ask the same question, "Are you truly free?" Oh, they too had a response, **"We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"** Isn't that also trying to escape from the real reality into a different one? Think about Abraham's descendants. Clearly these people were talking about his earthly descendants. Well, what happened to those descendants *IN REALITY*? Four hundred years in slavery to Egypt. Taken into captivity by both the Assyrians and Babylonians. And in this current discussion with Jesus, where were they? The Romans were ruling over them. Free?! Hardly.

But they were missing the point! When we try to do anything to escape reality into our own reality, do we also miss the point?

I think back to our friend in the bagel shop. Perhaps he listened to his ear buds until they ran out of battery life. Then what? He had to take them out...back to reality. I think back to the mom pushing the stroller with her three children, heading to the park to get a little break from living in their tiny apartment. But when park time is done...back to reality. Or I think about you and me. Even coming here to church. Jesus speaks to your heart. You know he loves you. Then you hear that last "Amen" and head...back to reality.

What is that reality we all share? Rather, what is the reality from which we are all begging to escape? I go back a few weeks. There I sat in the chapel at the seminary during summer quarter. The words were before me. I stared at them. "Hasten to save me O God!" *HASTEN!* Why? Why that word? Because my reality is horrible! It is no different for every single human being walking this planet. Our reality is horrible. Our reality is sin!

Yes, we all try to escape from that reality. Perhaps it is to just put ear buds in and listen to music. Perhaps we try to escape that reality by justifying the sin – not as bad as others! Perhaps we try to escape the reality of our sin by ignoring it. Perhaps we try to escape the reality of sin by thinking about that sin, dwelling on that sin, shedding countless tears over that sin, and then convincing ourselves... "God will be ok with me now because that sin has caused me so much suffering." Or perhaps we even try to escape that reality by putting the blame on God – the woman YOU put here, were the words Adam said.

Well, pull those ear buds out of your ears and what do you have? Reality. No matter how you try to escape, you can't escape. Sin. Reality. It makes you want to scream! But what good would that even do? The shackles still hold; the chains still bind; the reality is still there – sin. It's gross. It's ugly. It's painful. It's our reality! Even if you truly know and feel and experience forgiveness here in church, those sins still are there when you come home, right? It is almost like we can't let go. It's almost as though we are never free from those sins.

If we could go back and change things, we would. If we could tell our former self to not do those sins, we would. Imagine having that conversation with your former self. Imagine sitting in that room with yourself before deciding to commit that sin. It doesn't really matter what the sin may be because it is any sin. But especially the one you remember all these years and is still there; still haunting you; still enslaving you. I know you know that sin. Perhaps no one knows that sin but you; perhaps everyone knows that sin. What would the conversation with your former self be like, knowing how that sin has plagued you all these years? Perhaps the words from Jesus come to mind: "If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off." Would you tell your former self to cut off your right hand or gouge out your eye? Jesus said: **"Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. A slave has no permanent place in the family."** No matter what you try, you can't escape that reality.

Are you free? Truly free?

It hurts. It haunts. It enslaves. But...it is not the truth; it's not your reality! Jesus said, **"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."**

What is that truth? Listen:

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin (Psalm 32:5).

I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more (Jeremiah 31:34b).

Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon (Isaiah 55:7).

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us (Psalms 103:12).

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:18-19).

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Or words from our very lesson: **if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.** Well, guess what? That Son has set you free! Took the curse of your sin. Separated it forever from you as far as the East is from the West. Destroyed the shackles of the reality of your sin, not just now and today ... but forever! Broke the chains which have been holding you back. Crushed the head of the devilish serpent. Closed the gates of hell; opened the paradise of heaven.

That is the REAL truth! That is your eternal reality! Jesus has done it. It is what his death means. Sin destroyed. Hell forever closed to you. Chains obliterated. Today, tomorrow, forever! Not one sin connected to you. Not one ounce of punishment. Nothing but God's eternal, unending, pure, unconditional, undying love. Yours forever. The Son declared it. The Son accomplished it! No need to look for a different reality. This is your reality, forever!

Back to my original question: Are you free? Truly free? With 100% confidence you can say, "Yes, I am free indeed because the son – Jesus – set me free!"

Amen.