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Liberty: Freedom From, and For (Freed From: Objective Truth -Freed For: Justice, Righteous Relationships) Scripture Reader: Aubrey Fitzke, Reader

Genesis 1:26-31

26Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." 27So God created humankind in their image, in the image of God they created them; male and female they created them. 28God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." 29God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.31God saw everything that they had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Isaiah 1:17

17Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Micah 6:8

8The Lord has told you, O humanity, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Sermon:

For me, freedom is in the very nature of who God is, and thus is foundational to who we are. As Genesis tells us, we are created in the very image and likeness of God. At this foundational level of identity, many of us Christians, across the spectrum of tradition, would agree. Perhaps even many of our Jewish and Muslim neighbors would agree as well. But the living out of this identity of freedom is often where the disagreements within Christianity begin. For many Christians, HOW you live your life determines the relationship you have with God, and quite literally determines whether or not you are worthy to live with God in eternal life, which many Christians refer to as "Heaven." I am not one of these Christians. I believe our creation in freedom relieves us from this very burden of allowing right behavior to be the sole standard to which God holds us accountable. Right behavior is not what establishes and sustains our relationship with God. Rather, it is God's love for us in creation which establishes this relationship. And, since it is God who establishes it, it is God alone who would be able to break it in any way. Our behaviors, whether they are considered "right" or "wrong," have no bearing on this foundational creation of God.

It is all about God's activity, and we are told time and time again, as in Romans, chapter 8, that this creative authority of God in creation means that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God.

Martin Luther, a Reforming Christian Theologian in the 15th century, also spoke to this human condition saying, "God doesn't love us because of our worth. We are of worth because God loves us." In this understanding, God's love is not dependent on our belief or behavior. It is, instead, our belief in God's love that changes how we share our own love in the world. If we could ever actually believe we are loved and freely accepted by God, imagine how free we would be from worrying if we are "good enough!" Imagine how our lives would change if we just gave up on trying to be the person we think we are supposed to be, and simply be who we actually are! And if we all, as individuals, did this –Imagine the change throughout the world! Mountains would literally move! I often challenge Christian communities to practice seeing themselves through the eyes of God, looking at creation and saying, "it is good."

If we are created in this acceptance and love, then we are also empowered by it to love others as we have been loved, not based on what they do, but rather loving them freely because they, too, are created by God. In this scenario, there is no "other." We all belong to God. Therefore, there is actually nothing that is separating us from our neighbors either: not our faith, not our gender, not our sexual preferences, not our skin color, nothing can separate us from God and from one another. God's creation is unending and ever-imaginative.

This foundational reality means that we are freed from the understanding that there is "one right way" or one "objective truth" out there that we all need to work toward or try to accomplish in order to earn some kind of reward or eternal status. Rather by participating in all that is, each of us, using our unique abilities and creativity, are helping God to expand creation indefinitely. There are no limits to what can be, in this creativity, in and with God. We are freed from worrying about getting it "right" and freed for imagining how good it can be.

So now that we recognize that we have been created in freedom, the question becomes, what are we freed for? In this unconditional acceptance from God in creation, we are freed to drop any categorical standard that stops us from loving one another as God loves us. If God is not loving us based on our political preference, why would we allow our differences in this arena to keep us from acting in love for one another? If we are not valued by God because of the color of our skin, why would we place our own sets of values on others based on skin color? If we are freed from being on the "right" side of every dilemma in order to earn God's love, then we are freed to explore several options in living toward our fullest selves; living in relationship with one another and with God.

There is no one right answer for all things. This is the reality that actually unites us. This freedom to let go of our categories of who is "in" and who stands "outside" of God's favor, is, I believe, the very heart of Jesus's ministry with his disciples. Our freedom in love from God is lived out in how we share that freedom and love with one another. Within our current

situation, we can see it in our behavior toward one another as a community. Are we living in right relationships with others? With ourselves? With God?

The prophets guide our behaviors with one another and lead us in ways that build up our communities rather than tearing them down. Isaiah tells us, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. And Micah tells us, The Lord has told you, O humanity, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

In a world of liberation, all creation is freed from “getting it right” and freed for meeting each other face to face in kindness, mercy, and gratitude. And, as the saying goes, “In a world where you can be anything, be kind.” The Gospel calls us to kindness, to relationship. How are we responding? Amen.