

March 1, 2020 – First Sunday in Lent

“Lies That Steal Your Freedom”

Matt 4:1-2; 2 Peter 2:1-3

(highlighted numbers indicate corresponding slide)

Pastor John Luther

1 Lent begins by looking at how Jesus spent 40 days in the desert where he was confronted Satan. And the devil presented Jesus with various lies.

We are confronted with all kinds of lies in our world too. And I wanted to touch on a few of those. I'm not sure how many I'll be able to deal with, but we'll see what happens during these 40 days of Lent. But the reason we are going to go over the lies we sometimes believe is because there is a need to confront some of the silly nonsense that we've been handed and sometimes buy into in the wilderness of this world. Now, none of these lies are new. The lies Christians sometimes believe have been around a long long time. Just about every heresy we fall into has been a lie that Christians dealt with throughout the centuries. 2 Peter 2:1-3 tells us why a series like this is important. 2 Peter 2:1-3, *“But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.”*

The first lie, or false belief that the devil and the world tempt us with is that **the purpose of living is to avoid pain and seek pleasure**. That's a real temptation for Christians, and it can steal our freedom. Who doesn't want pleasure? We all do, but we are tempted to think that the way to get pleasure is to avoid pain. The truth is that the way to get pleasure is to go through the pain. We also seem to want to believe that, because we're Christians, we should somehow avoid problems and pain. But we can't. And the secret is that in many ways, God provides pain to heal us. And if we try to avoid pain, we will only bring more pain.

2 M. Scott Peck has written, *“The tendency to avoid problems and the emotional suffering inherent in them is the primary basis of all human mental illness.”* Carl Jung, the great psychotherapist, wrote, *“Neurosis is always a substitute for legitimate suffering.”* I may not agree with everything these guys say, but I'll buy that. The truth is that pain is in fact your ally and teacher. Pain alerts you to the need for healing and balance. The truth is that you will only experience true wholeness and freedom if you go through the pain and learn that you are more than a victim of the world around you. So, we have to face the pain and feel it, not avoid it, and trust that God wants to heal us in ways we may not understand right away.

I don't know where exactly the idea came from that if we're Christians, we can avoid pain—emotional, physical, and psychological pain. It's not like God ever told us something like that. God never says that Christians will always be successful healthy

and rich. And the Bible is pretty clear on the subject. And I mainly want to deal with that belief today.

Sometimes Christians remind me of the cat that got its tail caught in a crack and tried to figure out how to get it out without getting hurt. The cat couldn't do it, and neither can you. It's unbiblical to think you're going to get out of this thing without it hurting. If you think you can avoid pain, you will never be free. Just like that cat. And sometimes you will have really bad pain.

Prayer: Father we come into your presence praising you and worshiping you and adoring you because you are worthy of all that. You have been so kind to us. You gave us your Son to die on a cross and face God's wrath against sin in our place. You've accepted us and made us acceptable in your sight. You promised to get us home before the dark. And you became our sufficient resource for every need. But Father, even if you had never done any of that, you are still the Creator God of the universe, the ruler and sustainer of all that is, and you are still worthy of our worship.

Father, you know the people who are here in church today, and there's some hard stuff here. We know people who are out of work, or soon to be out of work, and don't know how to support their family. There are physical problems that are so painful. There are diagnosis that scare the spit out of us. There are financial difficulties. There's problems with our families. This is not a place for sissies. It is a dark world and it's Fallen, but you promised to never leave us and to be sufficient for every need. So we come to you like a child would come to their father who is wise and can fix it. And Father, we also pray for the one who preaches, forgive him his sins for they are many. We would see Jesus and him only. And in Jesus name we pray, Amen.

3 Now people have all kinds of questions about suffering and pain. Here's a few samples from various sources, blogs and questions people have asked me:

- "I've been depressed for months. My doctor said that I ought to be on some medication, but I told him I was a Christian and that God would make it better. He hasn't. What do I do?"
- "They told me at church that if I had faith my daughter would get well. I guess I don't have enough faith because she is worse. Is it really a matter of faith?"
- "My friends say that Christians shouldn't have emotional problems because we have God. Is that true?"
- "My mother just died of cancer. I don't think I believe in God anymore. How could he allow her death?"
- "I've struggled with my sin and addiction so long and I don't have any place to turn. I'm doubting my salvation and the power of God to help me. I've prayed about it, but it doesn't help. Do you think I'm a Christian?"
- "My boy is on drugs, and I just found out. I don't know what his mother and I have done wrong. We have been a Christian family and have taught our children Christian values. And now this."

I suspect you have your own questions. I know I've got mine.

Faith healers have been in the news lately. I don't know if you noticed. And a lot of these folks are **people whose hearts have found Jesus but whose heads haven't quite made it yet.**

Once a group of Christians told a lady that if she had enough faith and exercised the right principles, her small child, who had diabetes, would get well. That was silly enough, but the next part was dangerous. They told her she had to prove her faith by stopping the regular insulin injections. If she did that, they counseled her, then God would honor her faith and heal her child. I guess this comes from thinking that you are saved by believing in Jesus and they equated believing with faith.

Of course this was an impossible situation. If she stopped the insulin and her child died, she would have been responsible. If she continued the insulin and her child's disease continued, then that would have been her fault too. The comments of her Christian friends were, at best, very highly presumptuous, if not just arrogant.

4 Fortunately, a pastor was able to tell her the truth. Her friends were sincere, but wrong. You have to wonder how much damage has been done by sincere Christians with really unbiblical ideas. You have to wonder how many others just don't have anyone to speak the truth to them. Well, anyway, I don't want us to be one of them.

When you don't understand the truth about pain, it will put you in a horrible prison of guilt and anger and fear in so many ways. Not understanding the truth about pain will rob you of your freedom. So, pay attention while I tell you what the Bible really says about emotional and physical suffering.

You and I never really met him, but he messed it up for the rest of us. His name was Adam. He and his wife, Eve, did some really bad things for which they were cursed. The Bad thing for us is that they were the first of our race, and what happened to them affected the rest of us.

God said to Eve, *"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children."* And while Eve reeled from that little revelation, God said to Adam, *"Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you will eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it will bring forth for you; and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you will return."*

So what? That means "Men must work, and women must weep, and the sooner it's over, the sooner to sleep." It's been mostly downhill since then.

5 That is, until Jesus came. The Bible calls Jesus the "second Adam," and a lot of stuff the first one messed up the second One fixed. But that's another sermon. This one is about the things that weren't fixed and won't be until we get to heaven and about how freeing it is to know that. This sermon is also about how pointless it is to pretend that some things are fixed when they aren't.

The Bible tells us plainly about some things that aren't fixed.

Romans 8:18-23. *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. [19] The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. [20] For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*

[22] We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. [23] Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

6 While there is some good news in this passage, there's also some unpleasant realities that we'll be better off if we don't ignore. The passage says we have suffering in *"this present time,"* as well as *"futility," "bondage to decay," "groaning,"* and *"pains."* Now, I'm going to get to the good news about all this, but the **good news isn't really good news until you first know, understand and accept the bad news.** Believe me, it's bad. And maybe it's a lot worse than you think. We really get ourselves into trouble when we think we don't have it bad, when we try to avoid having it bad, or when we pretend that it isn't bad. If you don't acknowledge your problem, you can't fix it. If you pretend you don't have a problem, you can't fix anybody else's problem. And if you believe that you shouldn't have a problem, you will kill yourself with guilt over your problem. We'll talk about this more next time.

The main thing we need to learn, when we face our pain and allow it, is to trust that God really does loves us. Sometimes the pain is God's way of healing you and setting you free from suffering, if you can allow it and just let it be. We need to learn, that when we face our pain as it is, and run to Jesus, he can deal with it. Then we'll learn to laugh and dance in the freedom and the reality of God's sufficiency and the power that becomes awesome in our weakness. Amen.

Lies that Steal Your Freedom

Lie #1: The purpose of living is to avoid pain and seek pleasure.

Luke 4:2; Matt 4:1-2; Mark 1:13

We Can't Avoid Pain

- "The tendency to avoid problems and the emotional suffering inherent in them is the primary basis of all human mental illness." --M. Scott Peck
- "Neurosis is always a substitute for legitimate suffering." --Carl Jung
- God never said that Christians will always be successful _____ and rich.

Faith Healers?

- How much damage is done by sincere Christians with really unbiblical ideas?
- How many don't have anyone to speak the truth to them?

The Truth about Pain

- Some things aren't fixed.
- "I will multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children" –God to Eve
- "Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you will eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it will bring forth for you; and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; **for you are dust, and to dust you will return.**" --God to Adam
- The _____ fixed a lot of stuff the First Adam messed up, but we need to know about the things that weren't fixed.
- It's pointless to pretend that some things are fixed when they aren't.

Some Things aren't Fixed

- Romans 8:18-23, "I consider the sufferings of *this present time* are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to *futility*, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be **liberated** from its *bondage to decay* and brought into the glorious **freedom** of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been *groaning* as in the *pains* of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."