

“Saved to Save” - 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Chaplain Curt Cizek – July 17, 2016 - Mt. Olive Lutheran Church

Who has ever heard of Harriet Tubman before? Her story is an exciting one. She was a runaway slave who was able to get to the north with the help of some sympathetic people both white and black. She was so thankful for the help that she had received that she decided to risk her own life to become a conductor on the famous Underground Railroad. Although she could neither read nor write and was rather frail, she was bold in her efforts to assist escaped slaves in getting safely beyond the Mason-Dixon Line. In her many years of service, she made over a dozen trips and freed over 100 former slaves, including several of her own family members.

As Christians, we are in a similar situation as Mrs. Tubman. We too have escaped a slavery of sorts. We have escaped the slavery of sin. We no longer are headed on the highway to hell but because of Jesus' death on the cross. We too have hitched a ride on the Freedom Train. A train headed for our heavenly home. Is that it though? Is that where the similarity ends? Or is there more?

For many Christians, sadly, that is where the similarity ends. Many have escaped from their own slavery and they are content to be free. Many have run the race to freedom and rested on their laurels. Many have accepted the help of others in obtaining their liberty and have failed to reach back and lend a helping hand to others. You know, Harriet could have done that too. But then one hundred people might not have enjoyed the freedom she had. One hundred people might have been held within the prison of slavery. One hundred people may have remained in the clutches of ignorance with no future.

Were her efforts worth it? What do you think Harriet would have said? Consider a couple of facts before you answer that question. First, when her funds ran low, Harriet would hire herself out as a domestic servant in order to make more trips south. Secondly, in 1850 when the Fugitive Slave Law was passed she no longer just delivered the escaped slaves to Philadelphia, New York or Boston as she had. She felt that she could no longer trust Uncle Sam with her people any longer so she took them all the way to Canada. Do you think she thought her efforts were worth it?

The apostle Paul has a similar mindset to that of Harriet Tubman. He writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.” He was willing to do whatever it took to save whomever he came in contact with. Why did Paul say that? Why would he wish such a thing? What prompted that level of emotion? What provoked that degree of commitment? The answer is found in the last verse of our text. Paul writes, “I do all this for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” Paul was essentially saying that as he shared the Gospel message with others his faith was strengthened.

He then became an even more faithful servant of Christ. He realized, as he explained the Christian faith to others, which he began to understand it even better. In addition, he became even more convinced of the power of the Word of God as he saw others come to faith. Paul loved others so much that he was willing to do whatever it took to help them come to faith as well. To use the old cliché, “Love isn’t love until you give it away.”

It is similar to the first two servants in Jesus’ parable of the talents. You remember the story. The servants who had received the five and two talents had invested them wisely. When their master called for them and asked for the money in return the master was overjoyed to see how wisely his servants invested the resources available to them. He said to them “well done, good and faithful servant.” Since they had been faithful with a few things they would be given even more blessings. The master said, “For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance.” God wants us to use His gifts so that He can give us even more. You can’t out-give God. We have to be careful though. We don’t want to fall into the trap where we give in order to get. However, I’m sure that we’ve all at one time or another thought, “Hey, I’ve got to hold onto what I have because I don’t know if God will take care of me or not.” But God has promised to take care of us and He will. So keep helping others. It’s like that old Doritos commercial, “crunch all you want, we’ll make more.” That’s the way it is with God. He wants you to help others with the gifts He has given you so that you can be a blessing to others.

You see, God established the church for the purpose of spreading the message of His love and forgiveness. He gave to us the resources in order to do it. God gave to us the message of the Gospel in His Word. He also gave us the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us. May I use a sports analogy to help out here? You see many Christians are confused. They think that the church is like the Super Bowl. This is the place to showcase your talents. This is the place to be seen. But church, really, is more like the practice field. Now it is okay to use your gifts within the church but church is the place to hone your skills. Church is the place to be encouraged. Church is the place to gain knowledge and valuable experience. The Super Bowl is really the rest of the week outside of the church walls. That is the place to really use your gifts. That is the place to allow God to showcase your talents.

But we often do not follow God’s game plan during the week. We don’t tell others about Jesus. We don’t invite others to church. We don’t even know if some of our closest friends and co-workers go to church. We are so afraid to bring up the topic of religion because we don’t want to be labeled as a Jesus Freak. Or at least because we’re too busy.

Have you ever seen the Walt Disney movie, “Hercules”? It’s a great movie. Zeus was the father of all the gods. That is god with a small “g.” Zeus had a son named Hercules. Hades who was the ruler of the underworld was angry with Zeus so he devised a plan to overthrow the gods and take over Mt. Olympus where they lived.

He went to see a sorceress to see if there was anyone who could foil his plan. The sorceress told him that Hercules was the only one who stood between him and his goal.

Hades sent two of his henchmen to steal the baby Hercules and feed him poison so that he would die. They abducted Hercules but their mission was interrupted and they did not make sure that Hercules drank all the poison. One drop was left so he didn't die. He became a mortal but with extreme strength. Hercules was found by a human couple and raised as their own.

Many years later, Hercules was in the temple to Zeus when Zeus came to Hercules and let him know that he was his son. Zeus let him know that he could become a god again and come back to Mt. Olympus but he would have to become a true hero. So Hercules went into strict training to become a hero. After several years of training, Hercules finally got the chance to start proving his heroism. One day, the evil centaur Nessos was bugging a young lady named Megara, or Meg. Hercules took a few lumps but defeated Nessos. He went on to win numerous battles and go all over the world defeating innumerable enemies and saving many people. However, Hercules' title of hero still eluded him, his heroism had not yet been stretched to its limits.

Finally, one day Hades unleashed his evil plan to take over Mt. Olympus but Hercules came and saved the day. In the melee, Meg, who Hercules had grown quite fond of, died. Hercules stormed through the gates of the underworld and made a deal with Hades. He said, "You can get your revenge on my father, Zeus, by keeping me here in the underworld but you have to let Meg go." Hades jumped at the chance but by that act of selflessness, Hercules was deemed a true hero and since gods can't stay in the underworld, he too was allowed to go free. When Meg asked him why he did it he said, "People always do crazy things when they're in love."

It's the same way with God! God does blessedly crazy things because He is in love with you. Jesus, similarly to Hercules, was THE Son of God. He came to earth willingly to live among us and was raised by human parents. Jesus thwarted the devil's plan to take over the world by suffering and dying on the cross and then he too stormed the gates of hell. However, not to make a deal with the devil, but to proclaim His victory over him once and for all. However, Jesus did not just free one person but He paid for the sins of everyone.

That is a debt that we can't pay back so as Christians we pay it forward. Have you seen that movie? "Pay it Forward" is the story about a young boy who is challenged by his social studies teacher to make a difference in his world. He takes up the challenge. He devises a plan to help three people out of a jam that they can't get out of all by themselves. The first person he helps is a drug- addict. He gives the man all of the money he has saved, about \$40.

He tells the man to go and get some new clothes and go out and get a job. But when he turns his life around the boy doesn't want the money back. He wants the

man to pay it forward, to help somebody else out of a jam that they couldn't get out of alone.

That is what we do as Christians. We have been given a great gift that we can't pay back so we pay it forward. We help others out of jams that they couldn't get out of by themselves. We build relationships of trust with other people that we might have an opportunity to get to know where people "itch" so that we might have an opportunity to "scratch" them in the right place with God's message of love and forgiveness. We love and serve people into the family of God.

We put the needs of others first. That's what Jesus showed us and Paul showed us and even Harriet Tubman showed us. That's what we do as Christians.