

Third Sunday in Lent -- Rebecca Munshaw

Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

Imagine a horse, any type of horse you want (could be a Clydesdale or another draft horse or possibly something smaller—trying to help you see the immensity of the size this horse could be). This horse is tied to a small plastic chair, the kind that a little kid would have, with a little Disney character on it, maybe pink or blue—or even a normal-size plastic chair (like the white ones we used to have that would get super dirty outside because they were outdoor chairs....yet they were white...). The horse believes it is stuck in one place, because it is tied down to something; however, “Sometimes the thing that is holding you back is all in your head.” If the horse wants to be free it could easily move. This depiction reminds me of people. Many times we let things in this world have more power over us than we realize. In the end, “Sometimes the chains that prevent us from being free are more mental than physical.”

The Isaiah passage begins, *Come, all you who are thirsty*. Sometimes we are thirsty—all we want is to run to God and jump straight into his arms, casting off all of our sins and wrongdoings and accepting the abundance of love and grace that he lavishes on us. Sometimes we feel like this is not an option, though, because of the chains that are holding us down. In one of my favorite book series growing up ([The Archives of Anthropus](#), by John White), a girl stumbles into a cage of some sort (the kind with metal bars). (Keep this metaphorical cage in mind because it will pop up a few times and I don’t want to confuse you...) She later finds out that the only way to escape the cage is to realize that it isn’t there. She can see it and touch it (or at least her mind is convincing her of that) but the only way to get out is truly realize it is only in her head and then walk through it. (That is some crazy faith. I would be afraid that I would think that I did not believe it and then begin to walk out and slam face first into the bars.) This is like us. We allow these sins and idols in our life to surround us and create a sort of cage that we don’t see a way out of.

In what we read in Corinthians, it says, *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it* (or *endure it*, as some translations say). He provides a way out! There is hope. Many times we overlook the way out, or it is “too hard” to find, or maybe a hard decision that we do not want to make. Alright, back to imagining: imagine you are in a room with no windows and no doors, and the only thing in the room with you is a table. How would you get out? Well... if you have heard this before, you know that it is a rather easy straightforward answer. You look at the table and see what you saw, you take the saw, cut the table in two, two halves make a whole and you crawl through the (w)hole. So maybe it’s not as easy of a solution as we thought. Sometimes we get it in our minds that the way out is complex and truthfully crazy to think even of trying. God does not try to make it hard for us. Usually, and I hope some of you would agree with me, there is always a way out. Isaiah 55:6 reads: *Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. God is always around. He is ever-present.*

I am a painter because God has given me the abilities to be one. I approach painting with a prayerful meditative attitude. I try to do this because I want to glorify God with that with which he has blessed me—as I’m sure or I hope you all consider doing with the blessings God has

given you. One of my favorite paintings I titled “Wondering.” I imagined the sort of feeling where you are walking outside in the pitch black. It is not a wondering where there is fear, but one of anticipation of what will come next. Sometimes people mistake this sort of wondering for fear because the thought of not knowing what comes next is scary; that fear may cause us to stop dead in our tracks—then comes the cage we have created for ourselves. All people need to do is put one foot in front of another and trust that God is walking beside them and with them, even when they cannot see where they are going.

Our Psalm passage talks about how we earnestly seek God; it is like we are in a desert and are parched, and he is the only thing that can satisfy and fulfill. When we are residing in this metaphorical cage there are times when we just CRAVE God. Yes, we were made to crave. We want to cling to God but how can we when we are stuck in a cell created by ourselves? There must be a way out. Sometimes we cry out to God and seek him earnestly, but we do this from within the cage. God is asking us to trust him and step out. It may not seem easy, but oh, the wonderful reward which is a life completely and fully with God and his kingdom.

I urge you, *all you who are thirsty, come to the waters*—step out of the cage that you have built around yourselves. For Psalm 63 says that God’s love is better than life!! What a wonderful thing!! Why do we let something hold us back from the sheer magnitude and splendor of God’s bountiful and unfailing love?? Cast off the sin that so easily entangles, walk away from the things in life that hold you down from God’s love. We are like a child who has found something that seems beautiful in the ocean, but when we swim to the bottom to grab it we realize it is too heavy to take with us. We need to let it go and come to an acceptance that that thing may not be in our lives anymore and that is okay. If we don’t let it go we may drown, for something that only looks pretty on the outside but may not hold any value at all, certainly not as much value as our life. When we let it go we get to swim up towards the light, life and that feeling of relief when you get your first breath of fresh air after being underwater for a while. The magnitude of the liberation and joy we feel is worth letting go of the thing that we once thought so important. Later, we are running up and down the shore with the jubilation and carefreeness of a child and we stumble upon the thing that once held us down in the water. We see that it wasn’t what we thought and was as meaningless to us as a tattered old shoe. In that moment all we can do is laugh, be thankful and realize what a wonder it is to have a God that is so willing to give us grace and let us return to him.

Consider these words from our Luke passage today, *Then he (Jesus) told this parable: “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ ‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”* This parable shows us that we are not guaranteed reassurance. Because the tree was not cut down it doesn’t mean that it was doing its job and bearing fruit. God has mercy, grace, and patience with his people by keeping any sort of judgment at bay for the time being. We need to make sure that we do not waste the time and second chances he is giving us. God does not leave us to try to figure out how to grow and produce fruit on our own. He encourages us and gives us guidance to step away from the sins that are holding us from him.

Be encouraged as you go out today to recognize that God is a God of grace and mercy, and the ultimate provider of second chances. Step out of the cage you've made yourselves and experience the pure freedom and joy God has for you and wants to share with you.

I would like to leave you with these parting words to reflect on. The great C.S. Lewis once said, "There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'All right, then, have it your way.'" Which kind of person will you be?