



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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March 11, 2012
3rd Sunday in Lent
Sermon Text: [Exodus 20:1-17](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Exodus 20:1-17](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 69](#)
Second Lesson: [Romans 8:1-10](#)
Gospel Lesson: [John 2:13-22](#)

Set Free By The Spirit

From the law of sin and death
To do what the Spirit desires

As Americans we cherish our freedoms...the freedom to assemble, the freedom of speech...those are things that we treasure and when we think they are being hindered, we can get our backs up pretty quick. This morning our God talks to us about a freedom that we have that on one level I think we understand and appreciate, and on another level I think there is a way that we don't really understand and appreciate it. He said we have the freedom to assemble. Are we free from God's laws though? And if we're not free from God's Law, why are we assembling on Sunday morning?

[Exodus 20](#)...remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. That would have been yesterday (Saturday). I don't care how often Americans talk about Sabbath day laws being about Sunday, because the Sabbath was and always will be Saturday. So why didn't we remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy yesterday by all coming together to worship?

On the Sabbath day you shall do no work, right? So if any of you are sitting by Erv or any of those other guys who were putting carpet up in the gym, you better get away because they were working yesterday. Obviously God is about to strike them down because they broke the Sabbath, right?

In what the Second Lesson this morning said, [Romans 8](#), it's pretty clear. We've been set free from the law of sin and death. The Spirit has set us free from the Law. In the [Book of Colossians](#), God quite clearly through Paul tells us "Let no one judge you in regard to a New Moon celebration, a festival, or a Sabbath day. ([Colossians 2:16](#).) These were a shadow of the things to come. The reality is in Christ, and once the reality is here, you focus on the reality, not on the shadow. So in the New Testament, God never tells us to worship on Saturday like he did in the Old Testament. We are free in the New Testament to choose what day we are going to worship on. The early church chose Sunday, because that's the Lord's day, the day that Jesus rose from the dead. They could have chosen Tuesday at 3 a.m. and they would have been just as free to do it, but no one probably would have showed up. So in their freedom, they did what was permissible that also would be beneficial. As a way to remember Jesus' death, they chose to worship on Sunday. We are not bound by the Law of the Sabbath. God has been pretty clear about that.

Right about now I suppose all you kids out there are getting pretty excited thinking, “Does that mean I don’t have to honor my father and mother anymore? Can I do what I want like I’ve been doing and actually not be in trouble anymore?” In the New Testament, God said in [Galatians](#) and other places, “Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right and pleases our God.” Some of the Ten Commandments that we heard this morning God repeated for us in the New Testament. Some of them he told us don’t apply to us in the New Testament anymore.

You have to stop and think about what this means that we’ve been set free from the law of sin and death. Does it just mean we’ve been set free from the Law and its punishment and what we deserve? Or does it mean we are set free from the laws that God hasn’t repeated for us? The fact that we’re worshipping on Sunday and not Saturday tells us somewhere along the line someone decided it means we are free from that Law, right? Otherwise we should have been here yesterday. Somewhere along the line many of us just assumed the Sabbath was Sunday and figured that is what we are doing because that’s what the Third Commandment said.

Look at what it says here...“if you are in Christ Jesus, there is no condemnation.” Obviously we have been set free by the Spirit from the punishment our sins deserve. I don’t care whether you are here on a Saturday or if you are here on a Sunday, we sin against God by not loving his Word the way we should, whether it was Old Testament or New Testament. We don’t love his Word and we don’t love the time we spend with God. Sometimes you and I still view it as if we are doing God a favor by spending time with his Word and if we are there, that should be enough. God should be happy with us. We shouldn’t have to do anymore. If God has a problem with that, then he just needs to deal with it. Really? You want to go with that? I hope you don’t want to go with that? That’s kind of foolish, isn’t it?

We are set free from these laws, but we are not set free from our love for our Savior because there is no condemnation through the life and death of Jesus. The Law that God had placed on us that we could never keep because of the sinful nature, God still said to us “Be perfect and be holy,” but Jesus was holy in our place. Jesus lived perfectly under the Law. Jesus died as the punishment for our sins. Now we have been declared not guilty and when the Spirit brings that to us personally, we are set free from the law of sin and death. The Law was powerless to bring us to God. It never could and it was never its intention to bring us to God.

The covenant on Sinai was put into effect to show people how desperately they needed the covenant that God had made with Abraham, that all nations on earth would be blessed through one of his descendants. That descendant is the Savior who did what I just described...lived perfectly in our place and then died in our place. So now the Law is fully met in us.

When God looks at us, he doesn’t see our sin. He sees Jesus’ perfection. We are not bound by the Law. It’s not a matter of keeping the Law so that God will love us. God

has shown his love for us in this... “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” ([Romans 5:8](#).) So we are set free from the law of sin and death. That does not mean that we can now do whatever we want. God is quite clear on that. He says those controlled by the sinful nature can't please God. Those controlled by the sinful nature want to live for the sinful nature. But those controlled by the Spirit want to live according to the Spirit. The Spirit of God that lives in us has told us there are still things that God says he wants us to do. Not to earn his favor. Not to make him love us. He has already loved us, now we want to live according to the Spirit. That's how we say “thank you” to God for what he has done for us. He has set us free from these laws. They don't apply to us. They are not the means for our salvation.

Yet where he has repeated these laws in the New Testament, we want to do it because there is a part of us that loves God and wants to love his Word, that wants to be closer to him, that longs for that intimate close contact that we get when we receive the body and the blood of our Lord and Savior. We hear the words that tell us that this is for the forgiveness of our sins. We come closer to our Savior than any other way really while we are on this earth. We long for that. We don't have to be told, “Remember this” and “Do this.” There's a part of us that just wants it.

But we still have that sinful nature, so there is still this constant battle. We still need to live according to the Spirit by being in the Spirit, by being in Jesus Christ, by being connected to him through Word and Sacrament so that what God wants us to do becomes what we want to do. We want to thank him. We want to do all those things that he has told us are still a part of his will. He still tells us that he wants children to obey their parents. He still wants us to...what is that command he gave on Maundy Thursday? “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” ([John 13:34](#).) It's not loving to other people to have sex with their spouse... “You shall not commit adultery.” ([Exodus 20:14](#).) It's not loving to other people to steal what belongs to them... “You shall not steal.” ([Exodus 20:15](#).) It's not loving to someone else to have sinful thoughts or desires for what someone else has. We start thinking they are a jerk because they have it and we don't. Don't covet what your neighbor has. ([Exodus 20:17](#).) These things still apply to us because God has told us in the New Testament that is how we honor him and thank him.

But don't kid yourself. Don't fool yourself. Don't think that by doing them now God owes you something. “God, I have a big meeting coming up this week. God, I have a big test coming up this week, so I'm really going to pay attention in church today. I'm really going to read your Bible this week so that now you'll help me through that.” You don't manipulate God in that way. That's not the new self thinking. That's the sinful nature thinking. Instead, you want to be closer to him because he tells you the closer you are to him, the more you will be blessed. The more you will live to serve God and please God, not because you have to, but because you want to. We forget this at times in our daily life and in our life as a congregation. There are too many times that we want to motivate each other with the Law.

Parents, think about it. How often do you motivate your children with the Law? It's a lot quicker and it's a lot easier. "Do it because I said so." It takes a lot more time to say "This is what you should do because this is the way you thank God for having taken away your sins." You get halfway through it and they are already not listening, so you just give up and go back to the Law, right? It's hard work to live according to the new self and according to the Spirit and in a way that pleases God. It's not the logic of men. It's the logic of God.

We often cave in and give in to just going back, running back almost at times to the Law. God says if you are going to put yourself under the Law in any of this, if you want to say "God, you must love me better than you love Joe Blow because I do this better for you than he does," then you are really saying "I want to put myself completely under the Law." That isn't a good idea. You can't keep it. You can't keep it all. I don't care if you can do it better than Joe Blow. God says "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy. Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." ([Leviticus 20:26](#).) He doesn't say "Be a little better than that schmuck down the road." Don't go running back to the Law. Don't find your comfort in the Law. Find your direction in the Law. Find your guidance in the Law in how you want to live for God. But don't find comfort. Don't find any of those things because then you are obligating yourself to keeping the whole Law, and you can't do it. That's obvious. If Lent wakes you up to anything, it should be to that.

Live according to the Spirit because in the Spirit, there is no condemnation. That means, throw away all the excuses, all the rationalizations, all the things you do when you sin. Get rid of them all. Use that little chrome handle on the side and just flush them all away. Get rid of them all. Instead, just go to the cross of Christ because there's no condemnation there. There, find the strength to do what God wants you to do, not because you have to, but because you want to.