“Captive” Colossians 2:6-8 3:23-24

Herman Dick, Riverside United Methodist Church November 20, 2016

Paul is speaking to believers, encouraging them to continue to live in Christ; to continue to live with Christ and to continue to live for Christ. Then he gives a warning. His warning is to be on the lookout – not to be taken captive; not to be taken prisoner by the way the world thinks and acts. It’s ironic because he wrote this letter from a Roman prison.

I was visiting Lucasville prison yesterday as part of the Kairos prison ministry. Do you know the air smells better on the free side of the barbed wire? It’s the same air but it’s different. To be captive in prison in the US affects 716 per 100,000 of the national population –it’s the highest incarceration rate in the world. A number of the folks I’ve met in prison have told me they were there on a bum rap. It didn’t happen the way the DA said but the jury agreed. Many will go on tell that even though they were there on a bum rap, they stilled belonged there for the other stuff they did without being caught.

So I wondered how many prisons would we need if suddenly there was no statute of limitations and the authorities had full access to our lives. How many prisons would we need if the just the tax authorities knew all the under reported income and exaggerated charity deductions. How could we begin to pay for a lifetime of exceeding the speed limit and not coming to a complete stop. Every infraction.

How about if we were held to the Ten Commandments? Even if we somehow we made it past using the Lord’s name a s a swear word, I don’t know how many of us have not had an unhealthy desire - an obsessive desire that shut God out of our life even for a short while. I’m referring to the tenth commandment - Coveting. Wanting something with an unhealthy desire, so unhealthy it shuts God out even for short while. Back in 2010 (in my pre ministry days) I decided to trade up to a Touring motorcycle – A Harley Davidson Electra Glide. I narrowed my choices down to vivid black and red hot sunglow. Weeks went by and I couldn’t decide. It seemed like it was all I could think of. Finally, I cast lots and wrote vivid black on one page and red hot sunglow on the other. I crumpled them both up and threw them at the wall picking whichever one landed closest. It was vivid black and I still wasn’t sure. Six years later I still wonder would I be happier with the red hot sunglow. It’s a “G” rated story but it’s still an unhealthy desire. How many prisons would we need? Romans 3:23 tells us for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. How many Prisons would we need?........

 So, my supposition is that our starting condition is a prisoner of sin whether we know it or not. Friends our Jailer is not Andy Taylor and Barney Fife.

I believe our fallen nature is not capable of handling the freedom of choice we have been given (i.e., we are no different in that respect than Adam and Eve) and we are beset by an enemy we cannot beat. We are beset by an enemy who wants to destroy us or at least render us ineffective. We struggle with the need to be accepted and we are too willing to look to the other prisoners for acceptance. And so we find our self in a prison cell (of sorts) and over the door it reads condemned, separated, guilty and there was no way out until God sent His son; His only son to pay the price and to take the blows we deserved. And when we come to realize and accept that; when we are awakened by Grace everything switches. The chains of sin are gone and the sign over the cell now says justified, not guilty, forgiven, redeemed, set free.

**There a song we sing in Prison ministry that speaks to that moment. It’s called I will change your name. It goes like this:**

**I will change your name**
**You shall no longer be called**
**Wounded, outcast, lonely or afraid (we could add prisoner)**
**I will change your name**
**Your new name shall be**
**Confidence, joyfulness, overcoming one**
**Faithfulness, friend of God**
**One who seeks My face**

But now here’s the challenge – continuing on. Paul says just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. So how many of us are praising God for setting us free but are still sitting in some cell. How many of us miss smelling the fresh air? How many of us get held captive by the way the worlds thinks and acts. And how many of us will continue to try to figure it out on our own.

About a year and a half after I bought the Electra glide (in vivid black) our chairman passed away. He was more of a driving force than I knew. I got to one of those low places in my career where you don’t know why you come to work. You come to believe you are not making the difference you thought you should or it’s not evident to you. And folks I was blessed; the CFO of a small public company, my colleagues were the hardest working most ethical men I had ever worked for and with. Oh sure I had things to complain about but what I didn’t know that I had become captive. I got to the point where I was tempted to just quit. I remember I went to a trusted friend, the kind of friend who will tell you strait up. He listened and asked clarifying questions and I still didn’t know what to do. Then he asked me a question “Herm when did you forget that you work for Jesus Christ?” It was like being hit with a ton of bricks; like coming to your senses. You see I hadn’t realized that I had left Jesus in the parking lot most days when I came to work. I think the question encouraged me to pray about it. And so I prayed. Didn’t get any answers but I did get some more questions like “Herm how is it a good thing for your children to see you quit a job that without another one” I hadn’t recalled giving similar advice to a friend and former boss when he was in a similar bad place. That’s like not listening to you own preaching. Six months later a new door opened and I was invited into prison ministry.

Friends, when we become Christians, believers, followers of Jesus Christ, our work has just begun. We are forgiven, redeemed and adopted. And we are sent. He sends us out back to the cells we came from. Because there are many are captive. There are many who aren’t smelling the fresh air.

But friends when he sends us, he does not send us alone!. He sends us with himself, with his Spirit; with his desire. He sends us to be victors. And I tell you the truth we cannot effectively work for him, we cannot effectively serve him or imitate him without the help of his Spirit. We need him to give us his heart; his desire and we need to ask for it. Continually!

There are so many things I know in my mind that are right to do but I lack the will on my own. Jesus said the Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. We need his heart and he freely offers it in the Holy Spirit.

For example, It’s right and good for a pastor to visit and care for the dying, but something holds me back in the parking lot at hospice almost every time. And I’ve learned I cannot represent Christ if I go in with only my own strength. I can’t leave Him in the parking lot.

Two weeks ago, I went and visited my dad with my mom on my last trip to PA. But on that Sunday morning I went alone to say goodbye and that something was trying to hold me back. The close-by parking was closed and I was unfamiliar with this hospital. “Oh come on you already saw him twice in three days, you don’t really need to. Besides it’s uncomfortable.” Friends you encounter the Holy Spirit when you find yourself doing things you know you couldn’t do on your own. I went in and was blessed.

And so, this morning, this Thanksgiving, my prayer for us is to be encouraged to call on the Holy Spirit. Remember to call on the Holy Spirit because we have work to do. We may have earthly bosses, but we ultimately work for the creator of the universe. His name is Jesus Christ. And so, ask for His strength, ask for his courage, ask for his guidance ask for His love. Ask for his Spirit to overtake you because we cannot outgrow our need for Him (I don’t believe we are supposed to). And your inheritance will be His blessing. And it doesn’t get any better than that.

May God Bless you and the work you do - all for Him. Amen

Contributing to this message is an 11 minute YouTube “The Gospel” by Eric Ludy. I have watched this many times just before going into Lucasville prison for a Kairos weekend (because I don’t want to go in there alone). Google it and check it out.