

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and meditations in our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer; Amen.

The day has finally arrived! The much anticipated Super Bowl matchup will be held later today featuring the Philadelphia Eagles and the New England Patriots. Both teams have studied, practiced, and prepared as best they can. The stakes are high, the competition will be fierce, and the whole world will watch. But the question is, will they actually be watching the game? I, of course will be watching, Y'all know I'm an Eagles fan, I guess you could probably tell that by our church sign this week, but as hard as it is to believe, many people I know will be gathered around their television sets this evening, not to watch the actual game, but for the commercials.

As I think back over the years to some of my favorite commercials there is one in particular that came to mind as I read our gospel lesson for today. Do you remember a football player by the name of Derrick Coleman? He played for the Seattle Seahawks and one year Duracell had a commercial featuring him. Do you remember that one? At a young age Coleman lost his hearing. The story which was told in just over a minute's time, shared with the world how he was bullied, picked last for teams, harassed by coaches, and did you know he wasn't even drafted by the NFL? He was a walk on. And then came Coleman's tag line, "Everybody told me to quit. They told me it was over. But I'd been deaf since I was three, so I didn't listen." The scene ends with Coleman entering the Super Bowl arena and saying, "And now I'm here, with a lot of fans cheering me on, and I can hear them all." Lastly of course, there is a plug for Duracell, "Trust your power."

The commercial was one of my favorites because in just over a minute it created the sense of possibility, potential, empowerment and freedom to be what we were meant to be.

Coleman's story of living into the person he was meant to be, against all odds, gives us hope that we too, can be the people we were created to be.

Now I certainly hope that there are other places in our lives besides a super bowl commercial where we can be inspired to be our best us. Maybe for you, that's at home with good parents or a supportive spouse. Maybe for you that's at work or where you volunteer, with good colleagues and co-workers. Maybe it's at school with good teachers and administrators. Maybe it's on the athletic field with good coaches and teammates. Maybe it's with a best friend. Maybe it's at church with a supportive, loving church family. You know, I wonder, if that is really what we get from church, the inspiration and support that we need to be the best us possible? It certainly is a part of the gospel message, but whether we do it and experience it is another question all together.

Just last week we caught a glimpse of Jesus first real action in Mark, casting an unclean spirit out of a man, showing us God's commitment to act against all powers that keep us from abundant life. Our gospel for this morning isn't much different. We have Jesus healing Simon Peter's mother-in-law and freeing her to carry out her vocation to her community and her role in her home. And then, even more, we have Jesus going out and healing all kinds of people with a wide variety of diseases and ailments. Jesus frees them from possession and sickness and sends them out to live; to be the people that God created them to be. In fact, Jesus heals a whole city. Mark tells us there were so many people that Jesus healed that he is drained and needs to retreat for a time of prayer and restoration. But even his respite lasts only a short time before he feels called, either by need or demand, to go out again and do God's work, the mission that God has entrusted to him.

This story, this message given by Jesus to the world, the restoration of creation and the freedom to be what God created us to be, isn't just the theme in the first chapter of Mark. It's the theme throughout his gospel and through all of the gospels really. It's what Jesus has come to earth to do, what he will be killed for trying to achieve. God wants us to be set free so that we might live into our God given identity and potential, claiming our calling as children of God, and joining in God's mission to love and bless the world.

If you notice in our story for today when Jesus heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law what happens next? She gets up and serves Jesus and those gathered in her home. You may think that's really strange. This woman had a fever and was ill. And while today we think of a fever as nothing, back in the day when there was no Tylenol or antibiotics a fever depending on the circumstances, it could be deadly. For us, when we are recovering from an illness we may spend days on the couch. We may sleep a little extra. We may take it easy. But not this woman. Jesus takes her hand, helps her up and she serves them. If we look to the original greek the word for serve is "diakoneo", which literally means she waited on them. In other words, she fed them. If you notice in this account, there is no recovery time. Jesus' miracle frees her immediately for service.

I know you might be thinking wow that's a typical woman. She's sick and what is she doing? She's feeding her family and guests. But that was her occupation, that was her responsibility. Jesus' allowed her to be restored to fulfill her specified roll. Her service brought dignity and honor to her and to her guests, Jesus included. And if you notice she responds to the healing story, not with some big grand gesture, but in her every day ordinary tasks.

In the waters of our baptisms God has freed us from the bonds of sin and slavery to our sin. He frees us to be the people that he created us to be. The people we are talking about

becoming are people who respond to this gift of freedom in love and service to our neighbor. God doesn't heal us and promise to walk alongside of us so that we can do whatever we want, whatever we please. Instead he sends us out into the world in mission, to help us further the kingdom, to be his light to the world.

When Jesus left his disciples and ascended into heaven the reign of God had begun, that's what Jesus and his ministry represents. That reign delivers people, it heals people, it restores people to community, it forgives people, and it speaks truth to people. That's what we are to be about for the world. We are freed from ourselves so that we can unite with Jesus in his mission, to love those who are loveable and unlovable and to serve those who are like us and those who are different. Jesus doesn't pick and choose, remember he healed an entire town! And he doesn't want us to pick and choose either. He wants us to simply go and do and be.

So get up and go. You have been set free; free from sin, free from the expectations of the world, free from sadness and darkness. You have been set free to love and to serve our neighbor and to be a true follower of God. You have been set free to be the light. So go and do likewise. Amen.