

Luke 4:16–21

Captivity – Freed by Christ  
Lent Mid-week 2

February 24, 2021

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Rev. Brent Hartwig

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

**[*The Despair of Captivity*]**

[☞] About a mile off the coast of southeastern France, there sits a tiny island.

The entirety of the island is comprised of a single fortress.

A single fortress built back in the 1520s.

It's called the Chateau d'If (pronounced "deef").

[☞] The fortress is heavily fortified –

three towers and high walls overlook the steep cliffs

that drop straight into the ocean.

[☞] This fortress served as a military station for a time,

but it is most famous for being used as a prison.

Its isolated location and dangerous offshore currents

made it ideal for preventing escape.

[☞] The accommodations were dismal and crude.

Life in this island prison was grim,

making it one of the most feared and

notorious jails in the nineteenth century.

The lower dungeon cells were dug out deep beneath the fortress

with no windows, and no chance of contact with the outside world.

[☞] The prison became internationally famous

when Alexandre Dumas used it as a setting for his novel,

The Count of Monte Cristo.

If you've read the book, or seen the movie,

you know that the main character does, in fact, escape the prison.

But that just proves it was a work of fiction.

As long as it was a functioning prison, no one—ever—escaped the Chateau d'If!

[☞] Its captives had no chance, no way out, no hope.

**[*Captivity in the Scriptures*]**

Captivity was not uncommon in the Scriptures.

Multiple times the people of God experienced what it meant to be held captive.

[☞] There was slavery in Egypt in the days of Moses,  
and they labored under the strong and unsympathetic hand of Pharaoh.  
They suffered greatly at the hand of brutal taskmasters,  
and they cried out to God for deliverance.

[☞] Then there was the captivity in Babylon  
after King Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem and forced the people into exile.  
They had been taken from their homeland and  
compelled to live under foreign laws in a foreign land.

[☞] Again, in the days of Jesus  
they lived under the thumb of the Roman Empire and its governors and rulers.

[☞] The people of God knew captivity.  
So did individuals.

In the <u>Old Testament</u> , we read about Joseph, and Jeremiah, and Daniel – all spending time in prison.	In the <u>New Testament</u> , it was John the Baptist, and the apostles Peter and Paul.
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[☞] None of these people were residents of the Chateau d'If.  
But they knew what it meant to be held captive.  
They knew what it meant to long for freedom.  
They understood the helplessness experienced by those  
who had little or no hope of escape.

[*Captivity in our lives*]

[☞] Unlike them, you and I, we live in the land of the free!  
We are not captive!  
We don't serve foreign masters.  
YOU and I...  
We enjoy the freedom of living in a country where we can  
do whatever we want.  
We live under our own rule,  
under our own sovereign rights,  
fully autonomous and entirely independent.  
Right?

[☞] WRONG!  
Oh! We may live in the land of the free, but we are imprisoned!  
Greed. Lust. A desire for more.  
We suffer from an insatiable longing for more stuff,  
more pleasure, more recognition.

- [☹] Just look at the traditional family.
- [☹] It's the father who can't stop taking on more at work—  
either because he needs more and more money  
to keep his family's standard of living,  
or because his reputation is never secure enough to let him relax.
- [☹] It's the mother who can't stop filling her closet,  
or who can't stop working out,  
because she's captive to an image of herself from ten or fifteen years ago.
- [☹] It's the daughter who can't stop checking Instagram  
because she needs more "likes."
- [☹] It's the son who's imprisoned by his phone  
and the images that it delivers so easily.
- [☹] These people are captive, not in a stone prison or a foreign land,  
but they are just as stuck.  
Just as confined. Just as helpless.

These people are captive, not in a stone prison or a foreign land,  
But in the unhealthy relationship you can't get out of.  
But in the addictive behavior that overpowers any force of will.  
But in the dead-end job that you can't live with, but you also can't live without.

I'm afraid we know captivity far too well.

### [*Jesus Frees the Captives*]

[☹] This Lent ...

We are trying to find ways to confess the gospel in short and succinct summaries.  
We're trying to find words—seven words, to be exact—  
with which we might proclaim what God has done for us in Christ.

There're actually many ways in which we might do this.

As we read the Bible,  
we encounter many images and metaphors and descriptions  
of God and his work of salvation.

- [☹] We read about the Good Shepherd rescuing lost sheep.
- [☹] We read about the Suffering Servant taking on our punishment.
- [☹] We read about God speaking through a prophet to breathe life into dry bones.
- [☹] We read about the Lamb of God reigning on his throne.  
Any of these could help us summarize the gospel in seven words.

One way to describe the good news of Jesus is that he frees his people  
[☹]—he frees you and me—from captivity in sin.

Paul talks about sin in Romans 7.

In that chapter, he describes his experience as a Christian.

He describes how badly he wants to live faithfully,  
but how the sin in his heart compels him to follow its desires.

In the end, he recognizes how hopeless and how helpless he truly is.

[☹] *“Wretched man that I am!”* he laments.

**“Who will deliver me from this body of death?”**

**Who can secure his release?**

**Who can deliver him from guilt and shame?**

**Who can rescue him from a life of service to sin?**

**Who can set him free?**

**Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”**

[*The Gospel in Seven Words*]

Yes, oh, yes!

[☹] Thanks be to God, who freed Paul—who frees us—from all that imprisons us.

Sin, death, despair, selfishness.

He has freed us through his life and death and resurrection,  
and he continues to free us from every single prison,  
every single master,  
every single captor.

That’s it! Seven words.

“Jesus frees us from all our prisons.”

And he frees them, too,

as we proclaim this good news to them.

This is one more way to confess the gospel.

But don’t let this stop you from thinking of other ways.

Keep working on your own confessions.

Keep reflecting on God’s love in Christ.

And keep preparing to share the hope you in have in Christ. Amen!

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So we... Declare his glory among the nations,

his marvelous deeds among the people. AMEN! (Psalm 96:3)

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