

“God’s Word Is Not Bound”

“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!” (2 Timothy 2:8-9).

Limitations are frustrating. Limitations are disappointing. Limitations are irritating. Limitations are _____ (you fill in the blank). Perhaps, one of the biggest challenges with limitations is that they are humbling. None of us likes to change our plans and dreams because of natural disasters and their unforeseen impact or someone’s poor decisions or even our own poor choices. None of us enjoy being limited in what we can do because injuries or illnesses prevent us from safely doing the things we once enjoyed. None of us likes the limits that time places upon us as it keeps us from accomplishing all of our goals and even ages our bodies bringing more limitations upon us. Ultimately, limitations force us to face the truth that we can’t do something the way we planned and that realization is humbling.

This weekend’s readings are full of limitations. Each reading describes humbling circumstances that meant suffering for the individuals involved. Ruth and Naomi lost their loved ones and were faced with lives of poverty. Paul was in prison because of the Gospel message he was preaching. Jesus encountered ten individuals who had been isolated from their communities because of leprosy. In just these three accounts, we see the limitations of death and scarcity, persecution and disease, all of which reveal how limited this life really is. The lives in these readings were bound by sin and its consequences. The effects of the Fall are clearly displayed.

Yet, in the midst of these limitations, in the midst of a world bound by sin and its consequences, Paul shares a very encouraging statement about God’s Word. His statement is this profound truth, **“But the word of God is not bound!”** (2 Timothy 2:9b) Paul shares this powerful statement with Timothy to reassure Timothy that even though he, Paul, was in prison in chains, his situation didn’t chain, or hinder, God’s Word. The Word of God was still active and able to create faith and lead people to their salvation in Jesus. In fact, in some of Paul’s other writings, he would share how his imprisonments led to the sharing of the Gospel with some of his guards and even to the conversion of some of them.

This truth that Paul proclaims in the midst of his limited circumstances about God’s Word not being bound is affirmed in our other readings this weekend as well. Despite Naomi and Ruth’s losses, it is God’s Word that sustains Naomi’s faith that also serves as a model for Ruth. It is God’s Word that leads them back to Bethlehem because news spreads that the Lord had brought an end to the famine in the land of Israel. It is God’s Word that continued to be fulfilled and bring redemption as Ruth marries Boaz and from their marriage not only comes an heir for this family that had lost everything, but also the continuation of the family line that would lead to King David and ultimately lead to King Jesus.

Likewise, Jesus in our Gospel reading also affirmed and displayed that God’s Word is not bound. In the face of leprosy and the desperation of the ten impacted by this disease, Jesus, the very Word of God become flesh, brought healing and restoration to outcasts. Beyond that, He brought saving faith to the Samaritan leper who recognized Jesus as more than a master teacher or healer, but as the merciful Son of God worthy of his worship and praise.

In fact, in this account, Luke also points us to the ultimate affirmation of this truth that God’s Word isn’t bound with the detail that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem. Jesus, again the Word of God become flesh, was mercifully headed to Jerusalem to suffer, die and rise so that repentant sinners would no longer have to be bound to Satan, sin and death for all of eternity but instead be bound to Him for life everlasting. Upon the cross and through the empty tomb, the Word of God, Jesus Christ,

revealed that He was not bound by sin and its consequences and that through Him all believers in Him are not only going to be restored for eternal life when He returns, but they will also be sustained by His ongoing work until He returns.

This weekend, our three readings have presented us with evidence that God's Word isn't bound by sin and its consequences in this life. However, this evidence also reveals to us two great limitations that we as disciples of God's Word must endure. The first limitation is knowing that as we witness this truth that God's Word isn't bound in our own lives and witness for this truth in the lives of others we will likely do so from situations of suffering. Ruth, Naomi, Paul and yes even Jesus demonstrated clearly that life on this earth, especially as a follower of God, is one that endures much suffering. This side of heaven, the impact of the Fall, isn't something we can escape but rather it's something we must endure.

And in the midst of enduring suffering, the second limitation comes. This second limitation is that our lives aren't our own, our lives are bound to God's unbounded Word. For in the face of suffering, the temptation is to exchange the truth that God's Word is not bound for the lie that our lives actually aren't bound. Giving into this lie, we become, to borrow from Paul's illustrations, soldiers entangled in civilian pursuits, athletes who aren't crowned because we didn't compete according to the rules, farmers who have no harvest to claim.

Or to put things in a more practical manner, giving into this lie leads us to try to bind and bend God's Word to our own desires in order to avoid suffering and increase earthly pleasure; as we prioritize other activities over regular worship; as we hold onto hatred and gossip instead of pouring out forgiveness; as we feed and fuel our lust with extra-marital relationships and activities instead of seeking to live sexually, pure and decent lives as God intends; or as we leech off of the gifts God has given to others instead of seeking contentment with what the Lord has already given to us and thanksgiving for what He has given to others; these are just some of the ways we try to live unbounded lives. And sadly, exchanging God's unbounded Word for unbounded lives here on earth really doesn't give us the limitless lives we are seeking.

Yes, as we discussed at the beginning, limitations can be frustrating, disappointing, irritating and certainly humbling. As we hear from our readings too, limitations can often bring with them suffering. However, the limitations we face in this life still are a result of humanity's fall into sin and many times compounded by our own, ongoing sinful actions. So today, we gather not simply to describe and lament our limitations but even more to confess our self-inflicted, sinful limitations as well as our personal struggles with those limitations inflicted on us by the sins of others. Humbled and troubled by how bound we are to sin and its consequences, we too cry out for mercy.

And, today still, God's unbounded Word mercifully comes to us to release us from our bondage to Satan, sin and death and instead bind us again to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Daily, we remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, who binds Himself to us through the waters of Baptism so that we might die and live with Him. Frequently, we endure and abide in Him through the eating and drinking of His Body and Blood so that we might reign with Him in His kingdom at the marriage feast that has no end. Constantly, we confess our sins and receive the forgiveness He won for us knowing that His faithfulness covers our faithlessness. Yes, despite sin's limitations on our lives, we know that God's Word is not bound because Jesus endured everything for our sake so that we might obtain salvation and eternal glory through Him. And clinging to God's Word that is not bound and being strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, we seek to endure and share in the sufferings and burdens of our neighbors. May our Lord who bore all things for us, grant us His limitless strength and love to help our neighbors bear their burdens. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan