



Worship Resources

Scripture Suggestions and Sermon Starters

Release to the Captives: Jesus Preaches to His Home Congregation

Text: Luke 4:14-30 is the story of Jesus returning to his hometown of Nazareth to preach. In the synagogue, he read texts from Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6 proclaiming the power of the Spirit of God to bring good news, freedom, recovery, and the Lord's favor to the oppressed and suffering.

Sermon starter ideas: The response of Jesus' congregation turned ugly as he explained that the Isaiah texts mean God's care is for all people, not just for those who consider themselves to be God's chosen.

It is difficult for American Christians to connect with the experience of modern-day slaves, or to accept that slavery still exists in the world, much less in our own country or even our own hometowns.

A congregation may include those who do not understand that many people

in unacceptable roles in our society have been forced into that behavior against their will—for example, the teenage runaway who becomes a prostitute and sex slave to a man who pimps her out to clients.

The congregation may not want to know about the contribution that US consumers play in the slave trade worldwide—for example that diamonds in their wedding rings may have been produced by slave labor in mines in Africa, or that the expensive Persian rug in the living-room may have been made by a young child sold into slavery so that his family could buy food to survive.

A preacher will find that these topics, and even some of the language necessary to talk about modern-day slavery, are offensive to some people. This is a similar situation to that found by Jesus in his own home congregation.

A message on this text will need to address sensitivities to subject matter and language in order that the essential message is heard: God charges us with the responsibility to proclaim release to captives and to set free the oppressed.

This requires hard questions about our lifestyles and the role of the church in today's world. Must we change our consumer habits to wipe out slavery? Do we need to change the culture of our churches so that we welcome all people into God's love—especially those most in need of it, like the young prostitute?

The scripture makes it clear that freedom and release are only possible through the Spirit of the Lord. The pastor may want to ask the congregation: Will we invite the Holy Spirit to work through us?

The Gift of Freedom: The First Commandment

Text: Deuteronomy 5:6-7 is the first of the Ten Commandments given by God to the people of Israel following their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. The preface to the commandments is God's affirmation of this act of deliverance.

Sermon starter ideas: The text makes it clear that God's identity as the One God—and the Israelites' loyalty and obedience—is connected with their deliverance from slavery. In preaching on this passage, the pastor may want to explore this connection.

Why is God's power to bring freedom a foundational aspect of God's identity? Is freedom an inevitable consequence of faith? Or is freedom a gift of God, given in love for the world? What could it mean for people today that deliverance from bondage is offered to those who follow God?

Stories that may flesh out this theme can be found in the lives of modern-day slaves who have been freed. For example, in a story told by the not-for-profit group Free the Slaves, Ramphal and his family were enslaved in rock quarries in India. With hard work and help from antislavery activists, and much danger to themselves and others in the slave village, Ramphal and his family gained freedom.

Today Ramphal is still giddy with freedom, according to Free the Slaves. His children are going to school for the first time. He has dreams of opening his own business.

"I'm just so happy with this new life that I've got and it gives me so much

The Church of the Brethren Study and Action Guide on Modern-Day Slavery

is posted at www.brethren.org/slavery and includes pieces on:

- Modern-Day Slavery
- Biblical Teachings on Slavery
- Church of the Brethren Statements on Slavery
- Resources for a Worship Focus on Slavery
- Suggestions for Action on Modern-Day Slavery
- Resources on Modern-Day Slavery
- Bulletin Insert

joy, the fact that I can control my own mind, my own thoughts, my own movements,” Ramphal said. “I can’t even look back at my earlier existence.” An 18-minute video titled *The Silent Revolution* tells Ramphal’s story; go to www.freetheslaves.net to view it.

Walk in Our Shoes: The People of Israel Enslaved in Egypt

Text: The Israelites’ experience of slavery in Egypt, and their deliverance by God through the prophet Moses, is told in Exodus chapters 1-15. The story is lengthy, so a worship service bringing attention to modern-day slavery may focus on the experience of forced labor using the following excerpts: Exodus 1:8-14, 4:29-5:9, and 6:1-9.

Sermon starter ideas: A sermon on these texts may include stories from the lives of farmworkers today—for example the tomato pickers of Immokalee, Fla., who began a struggle with fast food giants in 2001 over a pay raise of just one cent per pound of tomatoes.

These workers have been paid as little as 45 cents a bucket, to pick and fill each bucket with 32 pounds of tomatoes. At that rate, workers have had to pick two tons of tomatoes a day to earn minimum wage.

The workers’ “Campaign for Fair Food” has succeeded in gaining agreements from Taco Bell, McDonald’s, and Burger King to pay a penny more per pound.

During a parade to Burger King headquarters in November 2007,

tomato pickers delivered hundreds of worn work boots belonging to farmworkers, *The Nation* reported. “Doubt our poverty?” they asked. “Walk in our shoes.”

A penny more per pound costs the company \$250,000 a year, but for a worker it means the difference between the 1980 piece rate and a living wage for 2007, effectively doubling their daily pay. (Go to www.ciw-online.org for more information.)

In preparing the message, the pastor may want to ask: How do modern-day experiences of worker oppression echo the experience of the Israelites’ slavery so many centuries ago? Just as God delivered the Israelites, how does God bring freedom today? What role should Christians play in the struggle for freedom for the oppressed? How are disciples of Jesus called to get involved?

Worship Resources

Responsive Call to Worship

(#1106 in *Hymnal Supplement*)

One: The invitation is given to every person by Jesus Christ: “Come to me! Follow me! Be my disciples!”

All: We come to this place, to this time, at the invitation of Jesus Christ.

One: In the name of Christ,

All: We accept the invitation to discipleship.

One: In the name of Christ,

All: As his disciples, we worship and praise God.

One: In the midst of a world where cruelty abounds,

All: We proclaim the God of Compassion.

One: In the midst of despair that threatens to swallow up whole lives and whole peoples,

All: We proclaim the God of Hope.

One: In the midst of indifference and apathy,

All: We proclaim the God of Love.

One: Come, let us worship together and share our witness of God’s living presence in the world.

—National Youth Conference Worship Committee

Litany of Confession

One: Lord, we come before You to confess, ask forgiveness, and seek new vision.

All: We confess we have been blind to humanity's need for freedom and deliverance in this new millennium.

One: We assumed slavery was abolished in our country in the 1800s, but we have not paid attention to the rise of modern-day slavery.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Sung response: "Kyrie Eleison" #1141 in Hymnal Supplement.

One: Christ, we ask for forgiveness.

All: We confess that our global economy supports the enslavement of human beings—men, women, children.

One: We have assumed we can spend our money freely, but we have not paid attention to where that money goes and how it affects people around the world.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Sung response: "Kyrie Eleison"

One: God, we ask for new vision.

All: We confess we have not seen the suffering of oppressed people in our own country, and even our own community.

One: We have assumed that immigrants are not being oppressed, that domestic servants are treated well, that the prostitute walks the street of her free will, that farmworkers receive fair wages, but we have not been paying attention. Open our eyes to the suffering of your people.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Sung response: "Kyrie Eleison"

One: Christ, we wait eagerly for you to transform us and our world.

All: Through the Holy Spirit's power forgive us, open our eyes, and set us free. Amen.

—Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Scripture Medley of Amos 5:11-15, 24

Reader One: You trample on the poor,

Reader Two: And force them,

Reader Three: Force them

One: To give you grain.

Two: Though you have built stone mansions

Three: You will not live in them.

Two: Though you have planted vineyards,

One: Lush vineyards,

Three: You will not drink their wine.

One: For I know how many are your offenses,

Two: This is what the Lord says,

One: I know how many are your offenses

Two: And how great your sins.

One: You oppress the righteous

Two: And take their bribes.

Three: And you deprive the poor,

Two: The poor,

Three: You deprive the poor of justice in the courts.

One: Those who are 'prudent' keep quiet in such times.

Two: Not a word,

Three: For the times are evil.

One: Instead seek good,

Two: Seek good,

Three: Seek good!

One: Seek good, not evil,

Two: That you may live.

Three: Then the Lord,

Two: The Lord God Almighty,

Three: Will be with you

Two: Just as you say.

One: Hate evil.

Three: Hate it!

One: And love good.

Two: Maintain justice in the courts.

Three: Establish justice in the gate.

One: And it may be that the Lord,

Two: The God of hosts,

Three: Will have mercy,

Two: Will be gracious

One: To the remnant of Joseph,

Two: To the holders of God's covenant.

One: Let justice roll on,

Two: Roll down,

Three: Rolling, rolling, rolling.

One: Let justice roll down

Two: Like a river,

Three: Like waters

Two: Wider than the Potomac!

Three: An avalanche of liquid justice,

One: And righteousness like a never-failing stream.

Two: Ever-flowing,

Three: A waterway of life.

One: So seek good.

Two: Seek good!

Three: Seek good.

One: That you may live,

Two: Really live.

All: That you may live.

—Walt Wiltschek

Naboth's Vineyard: An Interpretive Reading of 1 Kings 21

Reader One: 1 Kings 21: Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of Ahab, King of Samaria. And Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house; and I will give you a better vineyard for it; or if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money." But Naboth said to Ahab, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers."

Reader Two: Now people in the developing and disadvantaged countries of the world had land rich with oil and precious minerals and fertile land to grow crops cheaply. And the corporations and governments of the world said, "Give us your land, so that we may use it more efficiently and maximize its value and capital." But the people of the nations said to the corporations and foreign governments, "This is the land of our families, our source of income—small as it is—our home. We wish to stay."

Reader One: And Ahab went into his house vexed and sullen because of what Naboth had said to him; for he had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And Ahab lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food. But Jezebel his wife came to him and said to him, "Why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?" And he said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite, and said to him, 'Give

me your vineyard for money; or else, if it please you, I will give you another vineyard for it.' And he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" And Jezebel his wife said to him, "Do you not govern Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.

Reader Two: And the corporations and governments growled and sulked because they couldn't get what they wanted. So they called their boards and cabinets and stockholders together and they thought and thought. They even skipped lunch. When the investors and lobbyists came and asked what the problem was, the boards and cabinets answered, "Because there are resources to be tapped, land to be used, fortunes to be made—but the means lie just beyond our grasp at the moment. When we ask for the use of this land, those peasants and common workers say no." So the lobbyists and investors brought in consultants, who said, "You're a Fortune 500 company! You're a global conglomerate! You're the most powerful nation in the world! You can have what you want . . . here's a plan. . . ."

Reader One: So Jezebel wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, and she sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who lived with Naboth in his city. And she wrote in the letters, "Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth high up among the people; and set two underhanded men against him, and let them bring a charge against him, saying, 'You have cursed God and the king!' Then take him out

and stone him to death." And the men of the city, the elders and nobles who lived in Ahab's city, did as Jezebel had asked them in the letters. Then they sent a note to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned. He is dead."

Reader Two: So they found ways to force the people off their land and set up massive corporate farms; they found excuses to go into the countries and take control of their resources; they even pressed some of the people into forced labor for them to mine their minerals and make their products. They passed trade laws and policies that favored the rich nations at the expense of the poor. The people who lived in the developing and disadvantaged nations were left to fend with what they had. And the world, for the most part, went along with it. They looked the other way or sat back silently.

Reader One: As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, she said to Ahab, "Get up, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead." And as soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab got up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it. But then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, "Arise, go down to meet Ahab the King of Israel, who is in Samaria; look, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. And you shall say to him, 'Thus says the Lord: "In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth will

dogs lick up your own blood.” Ahab said to Elijah, “Have you found me, my enemy?” He answered, “Oh yes, I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord. Behold, I will bring evil upon you; I will completely sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male in Israel, for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you have made all of Israel to sin. And about Jezebel, the Lord said, ‘The dogs will eat Jezebel within the boundaries of Jezreel.’” There was no one who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited.

Reader Two: But some spoke up—one or two at first, then a few more. They asked, “Is this how God calls us to treat our neighbor? Is this how Christ said we’re to treat the poor? Is this justice?” The governments and corporations said, “Let us alone.” But the people, small though they were, said, “But God has called us to another way, called us to speak up. What you’re doing isn’t right. You’re so short-sighted in your greed! You talk about security, but how can you be secure when all your neighbors resent you? Even the economy will eventually pay the price, chewed up on Wall Street. This can’t go on.”

Reader One: And when Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and fasted and went about dejectedly. And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, “Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will

not bring evil in his days, but in his son’s days I will bring evil upon his house.”

Reader Two: The story in our day is not complete. Amid the confusion of conflict, inequality, violence, and economic oppression, anything is still possible. Will our voices be lifted up—another and another and another—until they are heard? Will the sins of the past give way to healing and fair treatment? Will justice roll down from the mountains? What role will you play?

—Walt Wiltschek

A Reading of Old and New Testament Scriptures

Student Reader: In Isaiah 1:10-17, the prophet Isaiah said to God’s people, “Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah! ‘The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?’ says the LORD. ‘I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies.’”

(Pause for 30 seconds.)

Student Reader: In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus said, “The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to

proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD’s favor has come.”

This was Jesus’ mission on earth, to join God in restoring the earth and everything in it back to wholeness. The life and ministry that Jesus embodied on earth is now given to us.

Adult Reader: In 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 we read, “This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us.”

Jesus empowers his followers, the church, to continue to reveal the kingdom to others. We are the ones God has sent to continue in the way of Jesus and give the world a glimpse of what living in God’s ways—God’s kingdom—looks like.

Student Reader: We are to bring restoration to all of God’s creation. That means we have a responsibility to care for the earth and everything that lives here. We can bring new life to that which has been forgotten, wounded, **enslaved**, polluted, or neglected . . . to meet the needs of a hurting and fallen world. How would our world look if God’s kingdom came in its full

potential? What would be different?

All: Imagine a world where . . .

We share with those in need, and no one goes hungry or cold.

All living things are treated with great value.

Joy replaces tears and depression; indifference turns to compassion.

Peace and dignity replace our struggle for power. Wars and conflicts cease.

All are free from the influence of insecurity, anxiety, and fear.

Forgiveness is extended and relationships are restored to wholeness.

Imagine a world where . . .

We are the voice of those who have no voice.

Everyone has a place to live and a community to support and care for them.

People are reconnected with their Creator, reflecting his nature in all they do.

Imagine a world where . . .

All surrender to Jesus as king and follow in his ways of love. Together, we can make that world a reality.

(Used with permission from Michael Novelli)

Student Reader: We, as followers of Christ, are part of something bigger than ourselves. We are the continuation of God's story as the "Body of Christ," led by the Holy Spirit to be the physical presence of Jesus in our world.

From 1 Corinthians 12:27, "All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it."

—Jon Keller

Prayer

God, we confess that our actions do not always live up to our best intentions.

We admit that our fear and insecurity, our busy schedules and distractions, our concern over our reputation and the opinions others have of us—all of these things and more sometimes, too many times, keep us from fully doing what you have called us to do.

We want to do your work in the world, but the work seems so big, so huge, so beyond us. When we do try to go forward, we often feel inadequate for the task.

Yet you have told us that we are more than meets the eye. Our fragile vessels take on new and unimagined power when your light shines through us. Our feeble efforts take on new strength. Our hesitant steps find firmer footing.

And when our little drop in the bucket joins another and another and another . . . eventually the bucket overflows, the spillover forms trickles, the trickles form streams, the streams form rivers, the rivers form seas.

Help us to see with your eyes, God, knowing the bigger picture is there even when we can't see it. Keep us true to the task, even when it's hard. And never let us doubt that our little contribution can make a difference.

Amen.

—Walt Wiltschek

Passion Prayer

(#1134 in *Hymnal Supplement*)

Your word in me is a burning fire, burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in.

Let it burst from me like fire and flame to transform the earth and all its people to the glory of your name. Amen.

—Author unknown, based on Jer. 20:9b

Lord, Help Us to Say NO: A Prayer of Commitment

When the advertisements offer us everything, if only we have the money,

Lord, help us to say no, because you offer us abundant life, if only we do without.

To your way of simplicity, help us to say yes.

When the easier way to succeed means we lose our integrity,

Lord, help us to say no, even though the harder way means we lose our easy arrogance.

To your way of authenticity, help us to say yes.

When the church seduces us to conform, and make nice,

Lord, help us to say no, for you want us to rebel, and be real.

To your way of honesty, help us to say yes.

When our friends don't respect what we count as important,

Lord, help us to say no, even though we feel like hiding or giving up, just to save face.

To your way of courage, help us to say yes.

When our many distractions allure us away from the pain of the world,

Lord, help us to say no, even though we're not sure what do, and the feelings seem to be too great.

To your way of awareness, help us to say yes.

When we come to a crossroads, and we're not sure how to respond, and we're tempted to stand still, closing our eyes,

Help us to say no, because we know that getting stuck is the greater danger.

To your way of discernment that tilts toward justice, help us to say yes.

Jesus Christ, the compassion of God who has come to dwell among us and restore our souls, is not one who is "yes" or "no."

He is God's yes.

He is "yes" to all of God's promises:

"Yes" to hope.

"Yes" to freedom.

"Yes" to justice.

"Yes" to peace.

"Yes" to salvation.

"Yes" to life.

—Jim Chinworth

Litany of Dedication

(#1115 in *Hymnal Supplement*)

One: What have we to show to a world that is crippled by greed and blinded by power?

All: We have a Savior whose strength is in serving and empowering others.

One: What have we to give to a world that aches for a sign of hope and promise?

All: We have our lives as gifts of love to be shared. Today we dedicate our lives to the service of God, that love and life might abound on earth. Thanks be to God. Amen.

—National Youth Conference Worship Committee

Children's Story: Let's Talk about Shoes

Invite children to gather at the front of the sanctuary. Ask them to sit down in a circle, with their legs straight out in front of them, so that their feet are in the center of the circle. Make sure to wear clothing that allows you to sit on the floor with the children.

Today our children's story is going to be about shoes. What kinds of shoes is everyone wearing today? What kind of shoes am I wearing? Who else is wearing dress shoes? Who is wearing sneakers today?

(Listen to the children's answers and affirm them.)

Let's spend a moment just looking at how beautiful our shoes are. Have you ever wondered how shoes are made, and who makes them? Does anyone have any ideas about how shoes are made?

(Listen to and affirm the children.)

Do you know who made your shoes?

(Wait a moment and see if any child has an answer.)

Do you think I know the name of the person who made my shoes? No, I don't know the name of the person who made my shoes. But I can make a pretty good guess about what kind of person made my shoes. My shoes were made in China, so I know the person who made my shoes was a Chinese man or woman, and that he or she is probably a factory worker.

(Substitute the appropriate country of origin; make sure to look at the tag in your shoes to prepare for this story.)

Today our church is thinking about how workers around the world are treated, like the factory worker in China who made my shoes. We are thinking about things like, Are workers paid a good wage? Can they buy enough food for their families with that money? Do they have the right to choose what kind of work they do? How many hours a day do they have to work? Do their children have to work instead of going to school?

Today we are asking God's help to make the world a better place for people who work, in our country and all around the world.

Let's pray: Dear God, today we pray for the factory workers who made our shoes, and for workers all around the world. Be with each person who works for a living, in our country and in all countries. Bless them and their families. Amen.

—Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Listening Prayer for

Unspeakable Times

(#1126 in *Hymnal Supplement*)

O God, restrain us from speaking for you. Urge us to be silent and listen for what you have to say to us and to the world.

Reassure us when there are no words to express what we feel, brought up short by your creation of a world in which free will produces unmatchable goodness and unspeakable evil.

Remind us that in the created order of the universe you created a light that shines in the darkness, a light which no amount of darkness can put out.

Make us still so that we can hear your sighs too deep for words.

Be with us as we sit in silence, without a prayer, listening for your sighs.

—Julie Garber

Invite the congregation into silence.

Follow with a sung response led by a small group: “Per Crucem” #1008 in the Hymnal Supplement.

Benediction

(#1055 in *Hymnal Supplement*)

May God deny you an easy peace, and grant you instead, passion, a revolutionary passion that spills over into the world in acts of compassion and love, justice and integrity.

Go in the spirit and way of Christ, who is our strength, our passion, and our true peace. Amen.

—Carol Wise

Suggested Hymns

From *Hymnal: A Worship Book*:

- “Amazing Grace!” (#143)
- “By the Waters” (#148)
- “Hail to the Lord’s Anointed” (#185)
- “Lift Every Voice and Sing” (#579)
- “Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service” (#369)
- “Move in Our Midst” (#418)
- “O Spirit of the Living God” (#361)
- “Santo, Santo, Santo” (#400)
- “The Church of Christ in Every Age” (#403)
- “Thuma Mina” (#434)
- “We Give Thanks unto You” (#161)
- “When Israel Was in Egypt’s Land” (#164)
- “You Are Salt for the Earth” (#226)

From the *Hymnal Supplement*:

- “Didst Thou Not Give Us Eyes to See?” (#1111)
- “Go Forth for God” (#1058)
- “If I Have Been the Source of Pain” (#1144)
- “If You Believe and I Believe” (#1101)
- “Siyahamba” (#1097)
- “Spirit of Life” (#1129)