

**I Want to Break Free**  
**Palm Sunday, March 24, 2024, 10:00 a.m.**  
**All Saints Church, Pasadena**  
**The Rev. Mike Kinman**

Turn the handle, swing the door wide open, and walk through the threshold.  
Open your mouth wide and sing your freedom for all to hear and for you to believe.  
Break the shackles of the past from your wrists and ankles.  
Lift your arms high above your head in a V for victory.  
Sit in the softest love for you and read your blessing for the future.

I didn't write those words. One of you did.

Deborah Santana, you are one of many who every Sunday and more, either in person or online, either here in Southern California or around the world who turn the handle, swing the door wide open and walk through the threshold of All Saints Church.

So many of you have sung words like this in so many ways during our time together, so Deborah, I'm using your words as a placeholder this day as we walk through the threshold of Palm Sunday and into Holy Week. A placeholder for the song that is on our hearts and our lips. That among all the different reasons for gathering as All Saints Church ... reasons that are as many and diverse as those who gather. That among all of them there is a constant refrain.

In the words of the great prophet John Deacon, bassist for Queen.

I want to break free.

God knows I want to break free.

Deacon was writing and Freddie Mercury was singing about breaking free from a relationship that was draining their soul. But if you're old enough it was the music video, which had the band dressing in drag in a parody of the British soap opera Coronation Street, that got the song nearly banned on MTV.

It was apparently OK to sing about wanting to break free ... but when you actually tried to break free in a way that made advertisers nervous ... well that was going to far.

The message was clear. It's OK to want to break free. Just not too free ... and not if your freedom makes other people uncomfortable.

And that's the challenge, isn't it? Because I believe deep in our heart almost all of us want two things. First, we want to break free

Open our mouths wide and sing our freedom for all to hear and for us to believe.  
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And ... most of us also want to be accepted for that person we truly are, that we are truly becoming, that we are just beginning to discover.

And holding these two things in tension – wanting to break free from the expectations and conventions of others and being accepted by the community that sets those expectations and conventions – that is the challenge of the life we lead and certainly the challenge of the life we lead together as Christ's church.

And there is no better dramatic example of it than what we have experienced this Sunday.

Scene one. Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus finally claiming not only who he is but leading us all in claiming who we are. Beautiful. Powerful. Amazing. Images of God and creations of love and joy.

Jesus sings and dances with the crowd and together they and all of us lift our arms high above our heads in a V for victory.

Jesus doesn't just sing "I want to break free" Jesus breaks free in a way that cannot be silenced or stopped. Jesus and the crowd sing, dance and break free in a way that, as Luke's Gospel sings "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would shout out!"

And then...

Scene two. Jesus is betrayed, arrested, abandoned by all but a few women and crucified.

It's OK to break free ... as long as you don't break too free.

It's OK to break free ... as long as you don't make people with power and money too uncomfortable.

It's OK to break free ... as long as you stay respectable, don't rock that boat too much, don't challenge the purity cultures that divide and the etiquettes that bind.

It's OK to break free ... but keep it down, would you?

That's the challenge. We want to break free ... and we don't want to be crucified. And yet what we have just witnessed is that one so often leads to the other. Not just out in the world that so often feels like the draining relationship from which John Deacon yearned to break free ... but even in our own church.

We want to break free.

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We want to sing with Deborah

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And yet we are all ... every single one of us deeply shaped by the very world and cultures from which we want to break free. The very chains that bind us can feel like hands holding us and keeping us safe. And the chains that bind others can feel doubly so and more. It is probably more than anything why that even the most progressive churches bend slowly into moderation. There is no shame there. It's natural. Because the fear of being rejected if we break free too much or in a way that somehow is deemed unacceptable is real for all of us ... and not just as individuals but as a body.

It's not just will I get challenged in a way that is not only uncomfortable but perhaps just might be too much for me given everything else I'm dealing with in my life ... and we are all dealing with a lot right now. Though it certainly is that.

It's not just will people we love leave, will giving go down, and will the church as we know it die? Though it certainly is that, too.

It's also sometimes what is breaking free for some treads on what has become sacred for others. And we have to come face to face with the challenge of what is more important for us ... having what we have come to depend on for our own sense of well-being and the sacred ... or being a space where everyone, everywhere truly is allowed to break free and be who they are, who they are becoming and even who they are beginning to wonder they might be. And to try to figure out a way to do it together and avoid the soul-killing trap of labelling some people's expression of freedom as right and other people's expression of freedom as wrong.

Like so many situations that we try to cram into the categories of right and wrong, the solution is in Rumi's field which lies beyond that binary. It is in deep listening to and loving each other. Trying to trust that Fannie Lou Hamer was right when she said "no one is free until everyone is free" and trying to live the words of Ella Baker that "we who believe in freedom will not rest until it comes."

As the church, we live in this space between breaking free and betrayal and crucifixion every day of every year.

The heart of our being an incarnational faith is trusting that however we are made and whatever it means for us to become that is embraced by a God who yearns for our freedom to be complete.

The heart of our being an Easter community is trusting that though the world might crucify us for breaking free and becoming who we truly are meant to be ... Easter is coming with a life and a love and a joy that nothing and nobody can restrain.

Barbara Johnson wrote in her book Splashes of Joy in the Cesspools of Life that “we are Easter people living in a Good Friday world!” And I think that’s true.

And I also think it’s true that we are simply Palm Sunday people ... with the urge to shout for joy in the face of our oppressors all the while the story of Good Friday looms just over the next hill.

The inevitability of Good Friday can tempt us to cynicism in the name of realism. The inevitability of getting to the Passion drama can tempt us to temper our joy even in the midst of it ... a pre-emptive strike of self-protection against the terrible crash that can come when we allow ourselves joy’s vulnerability.

There is a reason that the writer of the collect we pray every night at compline not only says “give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering and pity the afflicted” but “shield the joyous.”

And yet diving headlong into the joy of truly becoming who God dreams for us to be is the only way to the joys of Easter. The fear of Good Friday is as real as the powers that wield it even today. And yet breaking free into joy and resisting those powers are one and the same. Joy is resistance and resistance is joy. And today and every day our challenge is together to take the joyful energy of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem and keep the song going to Calvary and beyond. To with Pete Seeger and Arlo Guthrie croon

*My life flows on in endless song  
Above earth's lamentation.  
I hear the real, though far off hymn  
That hails the new creation*

*Above the tumult and the strife,  
I hear the music ringing;  
It sounds an echo in my soul  
How can I keep from singing?*

And so, sing we can, and sing we must. Because though we know that Good Friday is just beyond the next hill we trust that Easter is beyond the one after that.

Sing we can and sing we must. Because we are Palm Sunday people living in a Palm Sunday world. And even at the grave and even in lent we make our song, Alleluia. Alleuia. Alleluia.

And so together, let us

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These are not my words or even just hers. They are all of ours.

This is not just idle chatter. This is our destiny.

It's time to break free.

God knows, it's time to break free.

Amen.