
Worship Service

BY BURT L. BURLESON

Call to Worship

Seek first the kingdom of God.
And all these things will be added unto you.

Chiming of the Hour and Choral Introit

“Blessed Be the God of Israel” (v. 1)

Blessed be the God of Israel, who comes to set us free,
who visits and redeems us, and grants us liberty.
The prophet spoke of mercy, of freedom and release;
God shall fulfill the promise to bring our people peace.

Michael Perry (1942-1996)

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Silent Meditation

All of us are made
 according to the image of God.
But only those who through great love
 have enslaved their own freedom to God
 are in his likeness.
When we no longer belong to ourselves,
 then we are similar to him
 who has reconciled us to himself through love.

Diadochus of Photikē (5th Century)¹

Invocation

O God, source of all, savior of all, and sustainer of all,
we lift our hearts to you now in worship
and pray that we might be present
as you are present now.

Receive our adoration,
our confessions,
our petitions,
and our longings
as we offer them in surrender and in hope to you.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
we pray and worship. Amen.

Hymn of Praise

“Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise”

Immortal, invisible,
God only wise,
in light inaccessible
hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious,
the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious,
thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting,
and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting,
thou rulest in might;
thy justice like mountains
high soaring above
thy clouds, which are fountains
of goodness and love.

To all, life thou givest,
to both great and small;
in all life thou livest,
the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish
as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish—
but naught changeth thee.

Great Father of glory,
pure Father of light,
thine angels adore thee,
all veiling their sight;
all praise we would render,
O help us to see
'tis only the splendor
of light hideth thee.

Walker Chalmers Smith (1824-1908), alt.
Tune: ST. DENIO

Old Testament Reading: Exodus 3:7-10

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

Epistle Reading: Galatians 5:1, 13-15

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery....

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

Gospel Reading: John 8:31-36

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Very

truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

The Word of the Lord for God's People.

Thanks be to God.

Hymn of Response

"Make Me a Captive, Lord" (vv. 1a, 2, and 4)

Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free;
force me to render up my sword, and I shall conqueror be.

My heart is weak and poor until it master find;
it has no spring of action sure, it varies with the wind.

It cannot freely move till you have forged its chain;
enslave it with your matchless love, and deathless it shall reign.

My will is not my own till you have made it yours;
if it would reach a monarch's throne, it must its crown abjure.

It only stands unbent amid the clashing strife,
when on your bosom it has leant, and found in you its life.

George Matheson (1842-1906), alt.

Suggested Tunes: ST. MICHAEL or TRENTHAM

Offering

Hymn of Preparation

"A Hymn for Freedom"

Lord, hear our prayer for all enslaved,
captives of power's errant way.
Let cries for justice all be heard
and sleeping consciences be stirred.

Lord, hear our prayer for fearful minds,
captives of thin and dark confines.
Let deaf ears hear and blind eyes see,
that truth confront and set them free.

Lord, hear our prayer that we are freed
from life's oppressive lusts and greed.
Let every need that selves conceive
meet deeper loves as we believe.

Lord, hear our prayer and haste the day
when bonds of sin will not hold sway.
Let passionate goodness be our will
and freedom's longings all fulfill.

Burt L. Burluson (2011)

Tune: DISTRESS

(See pp. 53-54 of this volume.)

Sermon

Meditation in Preparation for Communion

In the Passover Seder, the ritual meal in which Jews celebrate their freedom from Egyptian slavery, contemporary Jews are reminded that God "freed us from the yoke of Egyptian slavery so that we might be slaves to him."

Why are the Hebrews freed from slavery – because God is in favor of liberation? No. In Scripture the slavery of sin is false worship, submission to false gods. The Hebrews are freed from slavery to the Pharaoh so that they might find their true freedom in service to Yahweh as a holy people, a nation where everyone gets to be a priest.

At the heart of the Christian life is a holy paradox: the more securely we are tethered to Christ, the more obedient we are to his way rather than the world's ways, the more free we become. Or as Jesus put it, "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

*William H. Willimon*²

Communion

Let this cup and this bread remind us
of the cruciform nature of our freedom in Christ.
Let this table fellowship teach us
how to give our talents, time, and resources
in service to one another, just as he gave his life for us.

Response (based on 1 Peter 2:9-10, 16)

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood,
a holy nation, God's own people,
**in order that we may proclaim the mighty acts of him
who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.**

Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
**once we had not received mercy,
but now we have received mercy.**

As servants of God, live as free people.

May we not use our freedom as a pretext for evil.

Passing of the Peace

Benediction

To God be the glory,
to God be the glory and honor and power,
the glory and honor and power,
forever and ever,
forever and ever.

Amen
and Amen.

NOTES

1 Diadochus of Photikē, *Discourses on Judgment and Spiritual Discernment*, chapter 4, in Cliff Ermatinger, trans., *Following the Footsteps of the Invisible: The Complete Works of Diadochus of Photikē* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010).

2 William H. Willimon, "Freedom," pp. 74-77 in this issue, here citing p. 77.



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