

June 19, 2022 (Father's Day and Juneteenth) | Summer Worship Service

TEXT: [Isaiah 61](#)

TITLE: **Freedom Delayed**

By the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy

On January 1, 1863, President Lincoln issued the *Emancipation Proclamation* declaring “that all persons held as slaves” within the rebellious states, are, and henceforth shall be free.”

According to the National Archives:

...the Emancipation Proclamation was limited in many ways. It applied only to states that had seceded from the United States, leaving slavery untouched in the loyal border states. It also expressly exempted parts of the Confederacy (the Southern secessionist states) that had already come under Northern control.

The confederate state of Texas was one of the southern states that seceded from the United States and fought hard to maintain slavery. Yet despite the declaration of freedom for the enslaved people of African descent on January 1, 1863, it wasn't until two and a half years later on June 19th, 1865, when federal troops arrived in Galveston, TX and took control of the state, that the still enslaved people were set free. Exactly, one year later, people of African descent celebrated their first Juneteenth, short for June nineteenth, commemorating their freedom from enslavement.

In his Letter from the Birmingham Jail, the Rev. Dr. Martin L. King, stated that “justice too long delayed is justice denied.” And to coin another equally important reality, freedom delayed is freedom denied.

In today's passage, God's prophet was sent to proclaim to God's people who had returned from captivity in Babylon. After years of servitude in Babylon, the city of Judah lay in ruins, and the people of God were worn down by living under foreign rule, treated as less than human, made to toil and separated from their home, their temple and all they held dear.

The word of the Lord came, while they were still in captivity to comfort God's people, and to assure them that God was going to do a new thing. Now, the people had returned to their beloved land, commissioned to rebuild the temple and their homes, and they were ensured that God's covenant would be reestablished to everyone who obeyed God. And yet after the Israelites returned to Judah, some of God's people were still oppressed, brokenhearted, living in captivity, and in prisoned.

The prophet's message was a word of hope—“God has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; ²to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning,

the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display God's glory." This divine message proclaims that the present negative circumstances will be reversed.

I imagine that the enslaved people of Texas thought that when the calvary showed up in 1885, it meant they were now free, their circumstances would change, they would no longer be bound, no longer made to toil in fields and the homes of their enslavers without pay, inadequate nutrition, rags and cast offs for clothing; no longer separated from their families, traditions, or culture; whipped or worse for standing up for themselves. The enslaved probably thought they were now free to pursue their dreams and aspirations, free to provide for their families, free to thrive in this new world in which they had merely survived for generations. Yet, today people of color in this country are still some of the lowest paid; still undereducated; still live in poverty, insufficiency, and in violent communities; and still are victimized by systems of oppression and injustice, all while being told to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. I contend that no one has ever pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps—many who have succeeded in this country did so while standing on the backs of bootless people of African descent, their inventions, creativity; their bodies, blood, sweat, and tears.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that today is Juneteenth and Father's Day. Michael D. Hannon, associate professor of counseling at Montclair State University in New Jersey, considers the two falling on the same day as an awesome coincidence. He is quoted in the New York Times as stating, "We can celebrate Black fathers who are doing their best to protect, provide and prepare their families for success, while also acknowledging the spirit and resilience and the pursuit of freedom among Black people in this country." In his book, *Black Fathering and Mental Health*, Dr. Hannon offers a series of essays with unique perspectives on the needs, challenges, and victories of Black fathering in an anti-Black world.

The Israelites were existing in a physical, mental, and spiritual space that we, we might also term as "anti." The space in which the people of God were existing was antithetical to all that God intended for God's people...and such is the case for far too many of God's people today. Too many of God's people are oppressed by the capitalistic country in which we live—oppressed by the astronomical inflation and cost of living; oppressed by America's history of killing, enslaving and denying the very personhood of people of color; oppressed by the lack of affordable, and just housing, disparate healthcare, and limited access to quality food; oppressed by an unequal and inequitable justice system that—the list of conditions and realities that oppress is exhaustive and exhausting.

Although the circumstances of the Israelites and today are daunting, God's divine messenger delivers good news to the oppressed, declares healing to the broken hearted, to pronounces liberty for captives and release for the imprisoned. The divine messenger's commission is to proclaim liberty in the Deuterocanonical codes' observance of the Year of Jubilee that occurs every fifty years when property and people held in captivity are to be set free. However, this pronouncement in Isaiah is not

a declaration that people must wait another fifty years for freedom, this is a declaration of liberation right now in the righteous name of Jesus.

Then and today, the liberation and freedom of people and communities that have been held in economic and social bondage is more than a promise to release, set free and rebuild. It required that the people of Jerusalem adopt, a God like love of justice and a hatred of “robbery and wrongdoing,” and it requires the same from us right now.

The promise of liberty and justice requires that those of us who have influence, affluence, and power willingly and graciously give up our influence, affluence, and power. The promise of liberty and justice requires that the people held in societal bondage define their own destiny, dream their own dreams, define their own standards of success and freedom. And our responsibility is to encourage, pray and walk with and for them. Our responsibility is to hold up their arms when they get weary, to wipe their tears and the sweat of their brow. Our responsibility is to work and toil alongside them and to provide reparative resources.

The promise of liberty and justice requires that we institute a year of Jubilee right now, in the righteous name of Jesus who was and is the fulfillment of God’s promise of liberty and justice, made known when he proclaimed—The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18,19)

People of God, this is the year, the month, the day, the minute of the Lord’s favor. Build up ancient ruins, raise up devastations, repair ruined cities, and lives, restore justice and peace, for all of God’s people. Freedom can no longer be delayed. Freedom can no longer be delayed! No freedom, no justice, no peace. Know freedom, know justice, know peace.

May it be so. Amen!