As many of you know, come the year 2020, we will be seeing a new face on the $20 bill. As announced a couple of weeks ago by the Treasury Secretary, Harriet Tubman was nominated and chosen to replace Andrew Jackson on the new $20 bill. This came after many months of nationwide poll based on popular votes. This marks the first time a woman or a person of color is put on the face of the US currency. It’s quite remarkable and revoluntionary if you think about it.

But why? Why Harriet Tubman you may ask? Who is Harriet Tubman? Well, if you remember your Amerian history, Harriet Tubman was famously known for her inspiration and her leadership before and during the Civil War in the “underground railroad” – which was a network of secret passageways and safe houses where many runawayed slaves from the south of the Mason-Dixon line could seek their safe haven refuge into the northern states. Some even went as far as across the border into Canada.

Harriet Tubman’s grandmother came on a slave-ship from western coast of Africa (nowady Ghana) and both of her parents were born as slaves while working in the plantation. Tubman never received any formal education or to learn how to read. The only so-called teaching she received was through her mother by the way of bible stories, prayers, and spiritual hymns. Tubman attributed her courage and bravery to her faith in God, who had shown her many dreams and visions. She was not only a folk heroine but a prohetess. These visions convicted her to help others into freeom and liberate those who were held in the bondage of suffering and slavery.

Escaped from her plantation in Madison, Maryland in 1849, Tubman found her way to the free-state of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Later on she went back to Maryland to rescue the rest of her family members. This was the beginning of the “underground railroad” movement. Tubman took great pride of her rescue missions as she onced quoted that she was simply the conductor who had never ran the train off track or lost any of her passengers.

With the help with many of her supporters, Tubman had personally led more than 300 slaves from the south into the north through these “underground” safe passageways and guided them into safety and freedom. These were not just 300 slave individuals, but their subsequent household families whose lives were forever changed by this one single woman.

During the Civil War, Tubman supported the Union Army by serving as a cook and as a nurse. Later on she also served as a scout and a spy for the Union Army. Although she never had any biological children of her own, she did adopt a daughter later on in life. Many, however, considered Tubman as their spiritual mother, a heroine of faith and courage, or even a saint from God. She was nicknamed “Moses” by those whom she helped rescue, for her role in liberating those who were enslaved and oppressed and leading them into the promised land. But to Tubman, she did not see herself in any way of a liberator figure like Moses. She did what she felt was the right thing to do and what she was called to be as servant of God and not a slave. She offered protection and provided much love and care as mothers would do.

Always thinking of others before herself, Tubman’s final word before she died of penumonia in 1913 was *“I go to prepare a place for you."* She attributed all of this to her deep rooted faith in God.

In our text today, we read about yet another slave girl who was liberated of her bondage from her owner. As we read last week, the Apostle Paul and his mission companion Silas were going around the region of Macedonia sharing the message of Christ to the many early Christians who were scattered throughout the region. They arrived to Philippi and encountered this slave girl who was not only enslaved by her owner but also by a spirit that enabled her to fortell the future. Her owner took advantage of her supernatural ability so that he could make a profit himself.

When Paul came upon this slave girl, she acknowledged Paul and Silas as slaves of a different kind. Incidentally the word “slave” in Greek can also be translated as “servant” . Both Paul and Silas were dedicated servants of the Most High God while the slave girl served obediently and subordinately to her owner’s authority. This slave girl recognized the mission of Paul and Silas as a way of salvation as sent by God. She was persistent of her proclamation to a point that both Paul and Silas were annoyed by her presence, so they ordered her to stop and commanded the spirit to come out of her. The spirit immediately came out of her and she was set free of the spirit in her. However, by doing so she also lost her ability to predict the futre. No longer seeing her as an profit making asset but instead a liability, the slave girl’s owner wanted to dispose her but the question was, who is willing to take her in? Who is willing to embrace her, and give her a second chance?

The owner then turned his attention to Paul and Silas for casting out the spirit from his property, now that she’s worthless to him. The owner sent both of them to the Roman authority and had them put into jail, or perhaps even wanted them dead.

While in prison, Paul and Silas continued to preach the gospel, singing hymns, praising God, and praying for those who held them in captivity. One night there was a violent earthquake and their jail gates were unlocked. As a result, the prisoners were set free to go if they so choose, but Paul and Silas chose to remain in the jail cell. The jailer was ready to put a knife on himself for his failure to keep the prisoners in the cell. But by staying, Paul and Silas spared the life of the jailer. The jailer then began a conversation asking them, ***“What must I do in order to be saved.”*** And Paul responded, ***“Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you and your household will be saved.”[[1]](#footnote-1)***

Both the jailer and his entire household were saved and were baptized by Paul and Silas. One theologian pointed out that there seems to be a bit of an irony here, that those who are in prison were actually free in Christ, and the jailer, who supposedly had the keys to freedom, was actualy the one shackled by his duty.[[2]](#footnote-2)

I think there’s a lot here in this passage that we can reflect on the theme of freedom and liberation. Paul and Silas’ liberation of the slave girl of the evil spirit and of her owner led to her ultimate freedom. Both the jailer and his household were led to freedom and salvation, just as the liberator Harriet Tubman led hundereds and inspired thousands more to their journey towards freedom of oppression and sufferage.

What about us? ***What role of a liberator might God be calling us to take part of today, however great or small?*** It could simply mean by spending time to talk to someone who is struggling in faith or through various challenges in life, or someone who just needed some attention and to be appreciated and valued. We need to be bridge builders to connect others who are suffering in silence and in pain. It might be a relationship that you wish to reconcile or start over again, perhaps with your own children, your spouse, your parents or your friends and neighbors.

**Our God is a God of transformation, redemption, and renewal.** Salvation is not up to what we humanly can do, but upon the mercy which God has graciously extended to God’s own children. We are simply instruments of God’s grace by making ourselves available, just like Paul and Silas, at the right place and at the right time. When God calls upon us to share our faith and to be God’s witnesses through our words and our actions, we better be ready.

Today, as we know is Mother’s Day. On this day, we acknowledge our Mothers’ love for their children and for the many sacrifices that they have made. For all those who are mothers, as well as those who are mother figures out there, aunts, step-mothers, god-mothers, or adopted mothers, we thank you for all that you’ve done, even when we have failed and disappointed you from time to time. You’ve tolerated the many mistakes that we have made and have given us a chance to learn and to redeem ourselves. Through our mothers’ nurture and support over the years, we too have been liberated and set free so we can be whom God has called us to be.

Growing up in the Asian culture, I have encountered many individuals and heard many growing pain stories, especially among many young people. Many of us have been held captive by our traditions and cultural upbringing. Our social roles and responsibilities have often been defined by our gender or sometimes simply the order of our birth. Our sense of identity and self-worthiness are defined based upon our successes and failures in life. Some of us have been reminded by our parents that we are never good enough as we are being compared to others. Let’s just accept it and deal with it because it is what it is. These are painful words to hear, espcially coming from our parents! I’m sure there are similar nuances as well in YOUR particular culture, context, or tradition. But the bottom line is, **many of us are not “FREE”**. We are enslaved by our own human standards, our benchmarks of successes and failures, instead of God’s.

But the Spirit of God gives us a greater freedom and grants us a clearer conscience to believe, as the Apostle Paul encouraged the early church ***where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom***.[[3]](#footnote-3) No longer are we being held bondage and enslaved but we shall exercise God’s gifts in us. *For the LORD does not see as mortals see; [for we] look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.[[4]](#footnote-4)* **The chains that hold us in captive must be loosened and the shackles that weigh us down must broken.**

On this day, let us also remember those, especially the women who are still “enslaved” as indentured servants, prostitutes or are being dealt as commodities through human and sex trafficking. We remember those who are being beaten and abused physically and whose voices are silenced by their partners and spouses. We remember those who are being deprived of proper education simply because of their gender, or having their roles and career paths defined because of their cultural tradition and family upbringing.

**It is our greatest hope and prayer that through the Spirit’s power of redemption and grace, God will open up our eyes and our hearts to empathize the anguish as experienced by these women, so that one day God will liberate these former slaves and transform them into powerful witnesses and servant daugthers of God.**

In the name of God the liberator, God the healer , and God the comforter, Amen.

1. *Acts 16:30-31* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Forney David G. *Feasting on the Word Year C, Volume 2, p.526* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *2 Corinthian 3:17* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *I Samuel 16:7* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)