Earlier this week, the current Secretary of Treasury announced that the highly anticipated redesigned $20 bill will NOT meet its release deadline of year 2020, citing “security enhancement” issue. In fact he said that it will NOT come out well after the current administration leaves office in 2028. Essentially they’re saying that this will NOT happen while under their watch. Period!

Well, regardless of which side of the politic you might take on this, the new $20 bill will eventually bear the face of a woman (a woman of color no less) for the very first time in the history of the United States. This came after years of public advocacy, community outreach and involvement to come up with the nominee and the proposed design. Whenever it does come out, it would be a momentous occasion in this history of America.

But why? Why Harriet Tubman you may ask? Well, if you may remember from your Amerian history, Harriet Tubman was famously known for her involvement with the “*Underground Railroad*” during the Civil War. The “*Underground Railroad*” was not actually a railroad but a network of secret passageways and safe houses where many runaway slaves from the south could seek their safe refuge into the northern states. Some of them even went as far north as crossing into Cananda.

Harriet Tubman’s grandmother originally came on a slave-ship from western coast of Africa (nowaday Ghana) and both of her parents were born as slaves while working in the Southern plantation. Tubman never received any formal education or to learn how to read. The only so-called education that she received was through her mother in the form of bible stories, prayers, and spiritual hymns. Tubman attributed her courage and bravery to her deep rooted faith in God. She was not only daring but she’s prophetic as well. Many referred her as their Moses because she helped set them free out of 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 and settled there. Subsequently she took this huge risk of going back to Maryland to rescue the rest of her family members. She could’ve been captured and be killed, but nothing was going to stop this “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 had lost any of her passengers.”**

During the Civil War, Tubman supported the Union (the Northern) 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. Therefore, many considered Tubman as their spiritual mother, a heroine of faith and courage, or even an angel or a saint from God. But to Tubman, she did what she felt was the right and humane thing to do and what she was called to be, as servant of God and not a “slave”. Incidentally the words from “servant” and “slave” are the same word in Greek “duolos” δοῦλος. 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."***

In the text that we read earlier, we also came across a slave woman who was being held under bondage by her owner. As we have been reading from the book of Acts in the the past couple of weeks, during this post Easter/Pentecostal season, we’ve come across stories of how the Holy Spirit motivated and inspired ordinary people to do extra-ordinary things. Last week, we read about how Lydia became a supporter of Paul and Silas’ ministry throughout the region. With the help of people like Lydia and others, many came to know the gospel and were given opportunities towards new life.

In our story today, Paul and Silas arrived to Philippi and encountered this slave woman who was not only enslaved by her owner but also by a spirit which enabled her to foretell the future. She was simply a property of her owner whose main interest was to make a profit off of her supernatural ability.

When she came upon Paul and Silas, this slave woman recognized them as servants of God and they were on a mission. The slave woman served obediently and subordinately because she had no choice being trapped under her owner’s authority. Paul and Silas were annoyed and frustrated by her presence, so they ordered her to stop and commanded the evil spirit to come out of her. The evil spirit immediately came out of her. However, by doing so she also lost her ability to foretell someone’s future. In the eyes of her owner, she was no longer profitable to keep around. He 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 2nd chance in life?

Having lost his source of income, the slave woman’s owner then turned to avenge Paul and Silas for casting out the spirit from his “property”. The owner reported to the Roman authority who arrested both Paul and Silas and had them put into jail and be flocked.

But Paul and Silas were not discouraged by their imprisonment. They continued to preach the gospel without ceasing wherever, whenever and to whomever. Even while they were being held in captivity, they sang hymns in their jail cells, praising God and praying for those who were holding them against their will.

Then one night there was a violent earthquake and their jail house sustained severe damage and the gates were swung wide-opened. All the prisoners could’ve escaped right out if they so choose, but Paul and Silas chose to stay. When the jailer came to check on the condition of his prisoners, he was surprised to see Paul and Silas remained in their jail cell. The jailer felt so ashamed for his inability to keep his prisoners in the jail. He threatened to put a knife on himself for setting the prisoners free. So by NOT walking out, Paul and Silas spared the life of the jailer.

Touched by God’s grace and mercy, the jailer then began a conversation asking Paul, ***“What must I do in order to be saved.”*** Paul responded, ***“Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you and your household will be saved.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*** Paul seized the moment to proclaim the message of hope and salvation. Because of this incident, both the jailer and his entire household were baptized and saved.

As one theologian pointed out that there seems to be a bit of a twisted irony here in this story, that those who are in prison were actually free in Christ, and the jailer, who supposedly hold the keys to freedom, was actually the one shackled by his duty.[[2]](#footnote-2)  At the end, it was the jailer who was the one who was being liberated and the prisoners were the ones who carried out the act of liberation and freedom.

I think there’s a lot that we can meditate on in both of our stories today, evolving the theme of liberation and freedom. Paul and Silas’ liberation of the slave woman offered her a new life and a new opportunity towards her freedom. Likewise both the jailer and his household were invited to freedom and salvation, because Paul and Silas chose to remain in their jail cell and ministered to the jailer the message of hope and salvation.

What about us? ***What role of God’s liberation of human suffering and bondage are we being called to take part of today, however great or small?*** It could mean that we take the initiative to spend some quality time with someone who is struggling in his or her faith or someone who just needed a little extra compassion and love. We can be that bridge to those who are suffering in silence and in pain. Perhaps there are broken relationships that we need to reconcile with our family, friends, and neighbors and to start with a clean slate over again.

Throughout this post Easter and Pentecostal season, we are reminded that God’s transformation, redemption, and renewal are happening throughout our everyday lives. WE just need to keep our eyes, our ears, and our hearts opened to faithfully honor where the Spirit may lead us. Bear in mind that salvation is not up to us or by our human accomplishment, but upon the mercy of God as extended upon God’s own children. We are simply instruments of God’s grace and witnessess to God’s love like Paul and Silas, who happened to be at the right place and at the right time.

When God calls upon us to share God’s presence and our witnesses through our words and our actions, we better be ready. God will put the right words in our mouths and in our hearts. As St. Francis of Assissi said that we ought to *“Preach the Gospel at all times, if necessary use words.”* The Spirit of God gives us 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) God grants us the freedom to be who we are, despite our imperfection and flaws. We have been set free by the works that Christ has already accomplished on the cross. **So now it is our turn to liberate and to set those who are spiritually captived free as well.**

No longer are we being held in bondage and enslavement, but we shall dream dreams and exercise God’s gifts and potentials that have been offered to 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 be broken.**

**Through the Spirit’s power of redemption and grace, we pray! We pray that God may loosen the chains of oppression within our society. We pray that our eyes and our hearts be opened so that we may empathize the anguish and come alongside with those who have fallen victims of injustices and abuses. We pray that one day God may transform these new lives into powerful witnesses and servants of God’s work in this world.**

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)