

A ransom for you

Held to ransom: "Africa's youngest billionaire was kidnapped by masked gunmen yesterday at a gym in Tanzania. He was taken captive during his dawn workout and bundled into a waiting car. Road blocks were set up as a nationwide hunt began for the tycoon, estimated to be worth \$1.5 billion. Police are waiting for the ransom demand." (*The Times last week*) Instances of people being taken captive and held for ransom are increasingly common.

*Mark 10:45. The Son of Man came... to give his life as a **ransom** for many*

This morning Yetunde read our first reading. At the beginning of his ministry, when he was still relatively unknown, Jesus stood up in the synagogue and also read the reading: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... captives will be released... the time of the Lord's favour has come." Jesus explained that this was **WHY** he had come - to release the captives (Luke 4:18)

In today's reading he tells us **HOW** he would release captives - By giving his life as a ransom (Mark 10:45) **WHEN** did he release the captives? - on the cross. "The ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver. It was the precious blood of Christ." (1 Peter 1:18-19) **WHO** are the captives? Jesus makes it clear that all human beings are captives. He told the Pharisees "Every one who sins is a slave of sin" (John 8:34) and when they brought a woman caught in adultery to him he said "Let any one who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone" (John 8:7).

In one way or another, we are all captives. But **Jesus has paid the ransom to set us free from the guilt of the past, the addictions of the present and the fear of the future.**

I went to a primary school in Orpington and my favourite teacher was a young man full of energy and enthusiasm. Many years later I was a headteacher at a different primary school in Orpington and happened to employ this same man, now retired, as a supply teacher. What a difference! He was weighed down by **the guilt of the past**, his mistakes and failures, regrets and disappointments. At times all of us have feelings like this, but Jesus is able to set us free from the guilt of the past. As the hymn puts it: "You took all my guilt and shame when you died and rose again!"

Addictions in the present can also hold people captive. We usually think of addiction to alcohol, drugs, pornography and the like, but there are many other habits and obsessions which can hold us in their grip. There are whole TV programmes devoted to cooking and I know people who spend all morning shopping, all afternoon cooking, and all evening eating! Whatever our obsession Jesus says “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

Fear of the future is particularly prevalent today with easy access to world news and so many current events cause anxiety. One of my grandmothers was particularly keen on listening to the weather forecast - for shipping! (She didn't have a TV, only a radio.) If she heard there was a storm in the Faroes or the Shetlands she would make sure she was prepared in case it came South. She died peacefully at night, but not in her bed. She was found sitting on a chair in the kitchen, dressed in her mac and waterproof hat, with an umbrella at her side. Jesus came to deliver all those in lifelong bondage to fear (Hebrews 2:15).

We conclude by looking at **the last word** in our gospel. We read: “The Son of Man came... to give his life as a ransom for many.” Many but not all! Well it is true that the ransom paid by Jesus is sufficient for all, but it needs to be accepted by each individual life. John 1:12 says: “As many as received him, to them he gave the right to be children of God” and to enjoy “the glorious freedom of the children of God” Romans 8:21

Several times at our Songs of Praise the Rev Anne has chosen the Charles Wesley hymn which says “My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose went forth and followed thee!” Jesus came to set the captives free and that includes each one of us. **The “ransom for many” can become the ransom for you.** Our response this morning as we kneel at the altar rail should be to receive him and give thanks to him. And if there are any lingering chains in our lives, past, present or future, we can lay them at his feet and trust him to set us free.