

CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH

2353 Rice Boulevard, Houston, TX 77005-2696 ctk@ctkelc.org ctkelc.org 713-523-2864 Telephone

June 14, 2026, The Third Sunday after Pentecost

Exodus 19: 2-8a; Psalm 100; Romans 5: 1-8 ; Saint Matthew 9: 35-10: 23

In nomine Jesu!

Everything we do today—what we read, hear, pray, sing, celebrate, and commemorate—converges on one gift, one truth, one word sacred in our American lexicon: **freedom**. Your pilgrimage to Germany, our observance later this week of Juneteenth, and George and Robert's ordination anniversaries all gather around that word.

But not the freedom our culture so often imagines and idolizes: not the lonely creed of self-sovereignty, not the hard gospel of rugged individualism. Biblical freedom is holier and harder. It is freedom bound to covenant, ordered toward neighbor, lived in communion, and made real when all God's children stand in dignity together—as the formerly enslaved Hebrews stood “in the wilderness of Sinai ... in front of the mountain.” It is the freedom of real bodies breathing unhurried air, of families no longer counted as property, of neighbors learning to belong to one another under God's mercy.

The Book of Exodus is, first and foremost, a liberation story: the account of how the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” “bore [their descendants] on eagles' wings” from slavery in Egypt to freedom. Today's First Reading shows what happened next at Mount Sinai. There God formed these newly freed people into a people whose freedom is communion with God, creation, and all the earth's peoples. On that foundation, the rest of Scripture builds. On that foundation, our faith stands secure.

Remember the story. Exodus begins with Jacob's descendants enslaved in Egypt, four hundred years after they came there—at Joseph's invitation—to escape famine. They had no cohesive identity, no agency, no life beyond the demands of their overseers. They were a people living entirely under domination, pleading with God – whose name they did not yet know – to set them free.

Then came Moses: ten plagues, Passover, deliverance, the pillar of fire, the crossing of the Red Sea, manna from heaven, water from a rock, and

finally Sinai—today’s reading—where God gives them the gift of freedom with a form, a purpose, and a responsibility.

That form is covenant with God, not self-determination. That purpose is community, not individuality. That responsibility is justice, not self-gratification. From Sinai through the prophets and, ultimately, embodied in Jesus, God’s gift of freedom has two parameters: God’s action for us, for which we give thanks and offer our worship; and the welfare of our neighbor, whom God calls us to love as we love ourselves. This is the freedom God desires for all the earth. It is freedom that springs from faith, not freedom enforced by fear.

It begins with God acting: God bearing the house of Jacob on eagles’ wings out of slavery; Christ proving God’s love for us by dying for us; God naming us and every child of earth “my treasured people;” God pouring the Holy Spirit into us so that we may trust God’s faithfulness; God making and keeping promises. Freedom springs from God and rests firmly on faith.

For God to be trusted, the story of God’s promises must be told, embodied, and enacted among us. That is how today’s Gospel, the ordination anniversaries we celebrate, and your upcoming Luther-land pilgrimage connect. In the Gospel, Jesus sends his first disciples to proclaim freedom flowing from faith: “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” For 60 years and still going in George’s case, and for “only” 59 years and still going in Robert’s, they have told and enacted that story through preaching, pastoral care, water, bread, and wine. Through them, the church has heard repeatedly: “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” For their continued proclamation, we give thanks today.

To let us taste “the kingdom of heaven come near,” God gives us a foretaste of the feast to come. In this holy meal, God gives us the Spirit we need: to trust God’s promises, to live the freedom that springs from faith, and to serve our neighbors—especially those oppressed, endangered, ignored, demeaned, or pushed aside; those Jesus calls “lost sheep.” With them, and for them, we bear witness to the freedom God intends for all.

_____11:00 am only_____

Those of you traveling to Germany will see one powerful example of what faithful freedom can look like. Visit the *Nikolaikirche*, a church near the Thomaskirche, and then walk to what is now *Augustusplatz*. A plaque there says that from 1950 to 1989 the East German secret police, called the Stasi, worked in that building. On December 4, 1989, ordinary citizens walked in and took it over. That small plaque tells a huge story.

For decades, people in East Germany lived under a government that watched them closely and punished dissent. Beginning in 1982, Christians gathered at the *Nikolaikirche* for Monday prayers by candlelight. They prayed for peace. They prayed for freedom. And then they stepped outside together.

Safe in the knowledge that the Lutheran Church supported their resistance, the crowds grew. Some nights there were thousands. Then tens of thousands. On October 9, 1989, police and soldiers were ready to stop them. But more than 40,000 people came anyway, carrying candles instead of weapons.

A week later, about 120,000 people filled Leipzig's streets. Less than a month after that, the Berlin Wall fell. The movement that began with prayer helped open the way to freedom.

That is freedom born of faith: people trusting God enough to pray, to stand together, and to act without violence. God used their courage to bless a nation—and far beyond it.

This is the freedom Jesus calls 'the kingdom of heaven'—the faithful freedom God sends us to proclaim in word and deed.

Amandus J. Derr
Interim Senior Pastor