

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Easter 3A
April 19, 2026
1 Peter 1:17-21

Ransomed; Redeemed

If you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Peter 1:17-19 ESV)

Dearly Beloved in Christ:

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia.

When someone is kidnaped, it's usually for the purpose of collecting a ransom. The kidnapper sets the ransom price, and once the ransom is paid, the person is released. Of course, that's not always how it plays out, but that doesn't change the concept. Thus, the word "ransom" can be used as both a verb and a noun. Likewise, the Greek word for "ransom" can also be rightly translated as "redeem." And the price paid is called the redemption price. In the ancient world if someone was a slave or a prisoner of war, he couldn't free himself from his captivity. But if someone else paid the necessary price, then that slave or prisoner would be set free.

In today's Epistle, St. Peter says to his hearers, "you were ransomed." That means that we were once captive and in bondage and that a price was paid to set us free. So whatever word is used, whether ransom or redeem, both include the setting free of someone who cannot free himself, and the price being paid to do this.

St. Peter says, "you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers."

Yes, you were in bondage to the way of life of the people of this world. Their lives, apart from God – which is where all of our lives would be, apart from the gospel of Christ – their lives don't lead anywhere. It's like we're a bunch of people wandering around in the dark, bumping into each other, falling over ourselves, not knowing where we're going, falling into ditches and

running into dead ends. That's the life of all people in this world without the right knowledge of God. No matter how wild or how refined, no matter how reckless or respectable, no matter how bad or seemingly good their conduct – all people by nature are leading an "empty way of life." It doesn't lead anywhere but into a dead end. And that's it. A "dead" end. It ends in death. Eternal death, separated from God. The "empty way of life" is, in reality, the way of death.

That's where we were. That's the state we were in. But, thank God, Christ has rescued us from that way of death. Luther puts it like this: Christ "has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil." All of that is what you have been redeemed, or ransomed, from. You have been set free from the death-trap of slavery to sin, death, and the devil.

Since the ransom, or redemption price, was more than we could ever pay, we were doomed. After all, all our supposed good works, heaped up to the sky, wouldn't be enough to break even one link of the chains that bind us. Nothing we have or own or can do is able to pay one cent toward our ransom price.

And so St. Peter writes, "it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed." All the money in the world, stacked up to the heavens, could not buy off God. Elon Musk, Bill Gates, and Warren Buffett could pool their resources, and it would all be for naught.

No, something far more precious was required to set sinners free. Only one price could do the job. It took the death of the Son of God – the sacrificial death of the sinless Son of God – to pay the price to set us sinners free. The price was "the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, from before the beginning. But God had it in mind that His Son would be the one to set the world free from the bondage of sin that we would fall into. God would send His Son into the world, in the flesh, as a man, to keep His holy law for us, in our stead, and to die as the sacrifice for our sins. He, Christ, "was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake." And Jesus said, when He came, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus is the "lamb without blemish or defect." He had no sins of His own for which to die. Spotless, faultless. And yet He is the lamb. A sacrificial animal. The lambs of the Old Testament were offered up as a preview of THE one and only Lamb to come. Jesus Christ is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." His holy, precious blood was shed, on the

cross, to make payment for our sins. The same blood He offers you today in his Sacrament, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." That is what you have been redeemed with.

In his book, "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe," C. S. Lewis tells the story of several children who travel to the magical land of Narnia. One of the children, Edmund, betrays the rest and goes over to the side of the evil White Witch. He realizes his mistake and returns to the other children, who are with good king Aslan. However, the White Witch comes to their camp and demands that Aslan hand Edmund over to her. She says:

"You know that every traitor belongs to me as my lawful prey and that for every treachery I have a right to a kill. . . . And so that human creature is mine. His life is forfeit to me. His blood is my property. . . . Unless I have blood, as the Law says, all Narnia will be overturned and perish in fire and water."

Aslan cannot deny what she says. But he takes the witch aside privately and talks to her. It turns out now that Edmund does not have to be turned over to the witch, and she goes away.

But later that night, Aslan goes off by himself into the woods and enters the witch's camp. He lays himself down on the great Stone Table, the witch's forces bind him, and there she slays him.

As you might guess, though, Aslan doesn't stay dead. He would later explain to the children:

"Though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. . . . that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward."

This story is a picture of a redemption. We were condemned to death by the Law, and there was no way to change it. But Jesus Christ stepped in and took our place, as our substitute, dying the death we deserve. But death could not hold Him. He has broken the power of death, conquering sin on the cross. Now He is risen and has set us free. That's what it means to be redeemed.

And this makes all the difference in our lives. Peter puts it this way, "Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile." This is the new life of Christ's redeemed people. Our lives, our conduct, will be different now that we have been redeemed, set free. Instead of

that empty way of life, we now have direction. We have purpose. We have meaning for our lives. We belong to God. We are His people.

We no longer belong to the world and its ways. No, we are strangers to this world, we are passing through as pilgrims. We are God's holy people, set apart for Him. Our entire lives are an act of worship. We serve Him in reverent, holy fear. We take our lives seriously, even as they are joyful, both at the same time. We don't take lightly this life we have in Christ. We take seriously God's warnings against sin and unbelief. We don't fool around with God's mercy and grace, as though it were a cheap thing. No, Christ has paid the ultimate price for our redemption. It is very precious indeed.

So we live in holy fear. And, because of Christ, we live in faith and hope. "Through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God." We live in faith, trusting in the God who loved us so much that He gave His Son for us. We live in hope, the hope of the resurrection. Easter hope. For God has raised Christ from the dead, and thus we have the sure and solid hope of our own resurrection. We have the hope of eternity in the presence of our Lord.

Luther echoes 1 Peter in the explanation to the Second Article of the Creed:

"I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true."

Yes, you have been ransomed, redeemed from the empty way of life that is the way of death. You've been redeemed not with gold or silver, but with the precious blood of Christ. You have been redeemed, so you now live as God's people, in holy fear and in faith and hope.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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