Trinity Episcopal Cathedral Sermon
August 22, 2010
The Very Reverend William Lupfer

You're a pretty good-looking crowd when you're standing up, listening to great music! It was fun...Michael, you don't know this because you were playing, but I got to watch them for a little bit here...and what a great bunch of beautiful faces you have. But I have to start with a question: When were you last tied up? Now...a few of you...don't answer. (laughter) But, for most of you...you were a kid...you were playing "Houdini…" Our culture is interesting about being tied up, isn't it? It's usually being "bound." So, remember the villain on the phone: "I'm sorry, he can't come to the phone right now. He's all tied up" And then he looks at the hero. and that hero is tied in a chair, you know, and "Heh, heh, heh" and he hangs up the phone. Being tied up, often for us, means being sort of bound, and held down. Because as Americans, we want to be free. We don't want anything to tie us down. Anything to sort of limit. So, you'll notice we created our dear Episcopal Church without archbishops. We have a presiding bishop, and we will elect our own bishop--thank you--no one will tell us what to do. We have freedom. We're pretty unique in the Anglican Communion that way. And it speaks of our cultural inheritance in this country...a focus on freedom.

But I want to suggest today...that maybe we look the other way...at not being "untied," but maybe consider how, who, and what and how we're tied <u>to</u>...where we are bound. These are important questions, I think, for Christians, because Jesus talks about being bound and unbound. Many, many times. And I know when you go back into your daily Bible study tomorrow--as you do each day--you'll notice that. You'll start to notice how many times Jesus talks about being tied up. Or untied. I think partly because their whole transportation had to do with that. So, where are your car keys, right? Anytime you'd say that, you'd talk about tying up and untying. When you need to eat...tying up and untying. It's a big part of that culture. We heard in the hymn just now, where Jesus was bound. So, it's an important question. And I want to turn it around...and ask you: "Where's the grace for you, as you are bound together?"

I'm imagining actually, each one of you, running through life in a three-legged race. Remember those silly three-legged races? Some people loved 'em and some hated them? You know...where the other person gets tied...and your legs are tied together, and then you have to run...and most of you trip and fall? It's awkward. I never quite figured it out. But imagine that your life is a three-legged race with Jesus...bound to you. If we look at the question: "Who are we tied to, and how are we bound?", then as we seek health and spiritual maturity, we seek to tie our lives deeper and deeper, to Jesus' life. And he uses that metaphor for us often...the comfortable words: "Take my yoke upon you, he says, and learn from me. For I am gentle, and easy. And you will find rest for your souls." It's in his culture that the two oxen that were together...one led, and one was yoked, and didn't have to worry about all that. So, in your spiritual imagination, I invite you to rebind yourself to Jesus. For me, it's not really a three-legged race, because he's a little bit behind me...Jesus, in my spiritual imagination. I never see him. I have to see him through <u>you</u>...through the faces that I look at. And so that's part of the game I play--and that Jesus plays with me. Where is Jesus in <u>your</u> face? And

how can I pick Jesus out in you? And then try to be something of a reflection in my own life.

So we bind ourselves to Jesus, in an ancient practice. As Jesus was using these metaphors of tying and untying...he had ancient stories in his own mind, and in his own heart. That came to him...that was part of his culture. And we share some of those, with Jesus. I think one of the most exemplary and fun stories of tying ourselves to something positive, is Ulysses. Remember him? The Greek myth...when he is coming back from the battle at Troy, he knows that they have some difficult seas...and he's curious. Now it's fascinating to me that the Greek heroes are always curious and smart. Not always strong--not physically strong, but they're always smart, and curious, and open to the world. So Ulysses hears about the sirens...the beautiful voices that pull people towards them...pulled the sailors in the boats, and they steer and then they break up on the rocks, and die. Anyone before Ulysses, who heard the siren's voice, turned toward their destruction. So Ulysses thought, and his curiosity grew, and he decided: "Ah! He had an idea!" He had his men,on the boat, tie him to the mast. And he told them, "Plug up your ears. No matter what I do...no matter how I look, or gesture...don't untie me. Sail to the such-and-such island, far past...sail to safety. And then untie me, and I'll tell you the story." So they did. And when he heard the siren's voice, he went crazy like everyone else...couldn't wait to get there...did everything he could to untie himself, and get to that place that was certain destruction. He was so ready to go there. But his people listened to him. his friends, his spiritual companions--they left him tied in the right place, and let him be bound there, so that they all sailed towards life. And as Ulysses sailed past...you know the end of the story...the siren's voice was not as powerful. When we bind ourselves to Jesus, and we stabilize there, then that siren call that trips each one of us up--and you all have your own. I have mine. That siren call is less powerful. It only happens, in companionship with each other, and with Jesus. When we bind ourselves in a positive way.

Here's part of the challenge though. We can bind ourselves in a very positive way. But even there, it becomes difficult. I'm thinking of my garden at home. What we do, is we have these hoses with little driplines, and you cover them up with dirt. Everything looks natural. But the plant you want is getting watered. You're not wasting alot of water, and the weeds aren't being fed. So it's a perfect set-up, right? Except...in this system then, the weeds grow right with the plants. So you spend all your time weeding...pulling the weed roots out from the plant roots, so you don't rip it all up together. When we bind ourselves to Jesus, and we have companions who participate in this with us, we still run a risk. It's that weed growing right into our taproot. In Tibet, I learned this summer...they have a word for that. It's called "Shempa." Shempa in Tibetan Buddhism means attachment. So when we bind ourselves to Jesus, sometimes we become attached to our own sense of who we are. Our own strengths, and our own life story. Slowly, over time, those positives turn a little bit. We become over-attached. "I'm a Lupfer! That's what I do!" Everyone of you has a life story that includes some of that positive attachment, that turns a little to the side...a little away from looking at Jesus...face to face. And the part that has strengthened us over time, now becomes our "weed." It grows right in with the roots. And so we weed carefully. We don't rip it all out. That sense of "Shempa." For us, it's being bound. That would be the Christian

way of saying it. We're bound by positive efforts. The apostle Paul said, "I do what I don't want to do. And I don't do what I want to do. I can't help it! I'm stuck! I'm hooked! I'm bound!" That's the Christian shadow sigh, and it's one that we all face--even when we're tying ourselves to Christ.

So the Scripture today is a bit of a medley, I think. A calling to us, to build a community, that supports us in this spiritual practice of binding our hearts to Jesus, in community together. And you'll notice in different-faceted ways, the Psalm and the three pieces of Scripture that we just heard...each of those is pointing us to a life that is truly free. Truly free...truly open. In Jesus' time, the spiritual leaders got a little lazy, and we see the encounter today, where they wanted to limit that freedom to a few set rules. They only wanted to water in a few places. And Jesus was breaking them back open. What they wanted to say was that right here at the altar, we own God's grace, and we mitigate it and transmute it and translate it to you. And so there are only certain acts of freedom you can take, on the Sabbath. And Jesus was saying "No! God opens up!" We're always sort of looking to make rules out of God's grace. So Jesus calls us all back into community, even as he seeks to be bound deeper into our own individual heart. For over 150 years here as a community that we're part of...we have bound ourselves together with Jesus. And created a common, open ground for us to be human...and to strive towards God. It's a privilege to do that with you, and I can't wait to see what comes next.