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Summer 2019

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FreeIndeed

If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. —John 8:36

A word from inside



Pastel drawing by Joe, expressing his sense of FreeIndeed from the perspective of a "lifer."

Life is about choices. One bad decision can have lifelong consequences that we are unaware of at the moment.

One such event, in my life, was allowing myself to be open to trying illegal drugs. When I was 18, I helped a guy with trying to remove his rear drum brake on his car. After helping him get it removed, it was late and he invited me and his friend to his garage to check out the expensive project car he was working on. We sat down and he proceeded to chop up white powder on a mirror and snort it, as if it was normal. There were three lines of powder and he passed it to his friend, who did the same and who passed it to me. I was nervous but I wanted to appear cool and calm and just did the same thing they did. Then I left and got back to the building where I had been working. The drug hit me not long after. I felt superhuman and worked nonstop all night. I was addicted instantly. It was methamphetamine which started a downward spiral of losing everything I cared about. My mind was changed and my mental capacity for rational thought was gone. I tried to quit but became severely unable to function on a basic level. Prescribed anti-depressants seemed to have little effect and I became lethargic and unable to make decisions to help myself out of the poor condition I was in. That seemingly small decision to use meth one time had far-extending consequences.

I became a participant with three other teenagers in a horrible crime of hurting a man so severely, he could have lost his life. I received a 50-year prison sentence for kidnapping and robbery for participating in this crime. After 3 years in on my prison sentence, I came to a point of brokenness through events that felt as if they were almost too much to handle. I cried out to God for a way out of this suffering and He was faithful to deliver me out of it and move me in with a strong Christian cellmate. This point of brokenness became thankfulness and the beginning of my faith in God with Jesus as my savior. I became a new man with a sound mind and a new healed heart which led me on a path of becoming mature and following Christ.

Now I am 40-years-old and have spent half my life in prison, though I am still serving my prison sentence, I have healing and forgiveness from God for my sins. I am truly thankful for each day, that I am alive and well, that I know Jesus and have hope. I can't imagine anyone starting out their life with a plan to become a drug user, to lose everything, to be involved in a crime, and to spend their life in prison.

This happened to me and it can happen to anyone in your life too. I didn't have this knowledge when I was young and knew of Christ, but didn't KNOW Christ in a more personal way as I do today.

—Jon



Supporting FreeIndeed

You may support the ministry of FreeIndeed with prayer, financial gifts, by inviting Pastor Jerry to speak to your church or organization, by visiting worship and by volunteering.

To make a gift to FreeIndeed, you may use this form, or donate online at www.freeindeedanamosa.org

Please make checks payable to the Southeastern Iowa Synod with "FreeIndeed" noted in the memo line. Mail checks to: Southeastern Iowa Synod, 2635 Northgate Rd., Iowa City, IA 52245

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Thank you for your generous support of FreeIndeed!

Seasons of ministry

Winter



The leaves of Fall are finally gone, the snow wall from me shoveling the driveway and the plows clearing the road is nearing six foot high. It's a raw 26 degrees below zero but the sun is shining in a bright blue sky and the roots are doing their unseen work down deep. What an adventure! As I was nearing thirty years in parish ministry and my 70th birthday, Nancy and I decided we were ready to do something different and exciting—like pastor a little church in Yellow Knife in the Northwest Territories.

God had another surprise in mind and here we are at Anamosa State Penitentiary. When we realize this record Iowa winter is what Yellow Knife must look like most of the year we're really glad to be Free Indeed!

Nancy and I slid into a snowbank driving to Immanuel Lutheran in Washington [Iowa], my 42nd congregational visit in our first 18 months. We enjoyed two delightful services with children's messages and a busy adult forum. Then we headed to Lost Nation and Oxford Junction—you gotta love Iowa's city names, and their friendly people.

Four of our highly attended Tuesday night Alpha meetings were cancelled due to ice and snow—a whole month missed because of the winter. Full stop? So it seemed, but deep down underneath, change has been happening. Mary Mortenson, our highly active and beloved Prison Congregations of America director retired and Renae Griggs from Colorado jumped into the pilot's seat. A former policewoman and SWAT team member, she's got a good grip on who we're dealing with and has honed her compassion and developed her "big picture" perspective on prison ministry. Concurrently, Pastor Lisa Parker from Ankeny, one of our key leaders since FreeIndeed's inception, chaired the Outside Council meeting where Lori Nietert from Cedar Rapids was elected our new President. And this week, Jon and Cesar met with me formally to establish FreeIndeed's "Christian Service Team," an inside council modelled after Jesus' servant leadership. The service team will round out our well-established Saturday worship and Bible Study, seeking out and serving the spiritual needs of

our ASP community. Associate Warden Tracy Dietsch has already suggested working with our entering Tip One status inmates who are limited to one worship service a month.

One dark, snowy evening, I got to meet and present with Curtis Fry, keynote speaker for Holy Trinity Lutheran and North Liberty Methodist's combined youth lock-in. Curtis's high impact testimony was that anyone, even a straight-arrow son of missionary parents heavily involved in his church can end up in prison if they disregard the red flags God puts in their life. Then after preaching and leading a forum in Tipton; parents, aunts and uncles, Sunday School teachers, and friends of an active FreeIndeed member bombarded me with boy scout pictures and stories of their member and son, Jon—an example of another "low risk" young man in prison.

Summer

Tomorrow's July and yet we're still in the midst of lightning, thunder and heavy rain. In a little over two weeks I will celebrate my second anniversary with FreeIndeed. I've done sixty presentations outside and still find every congregation's worship style is unique in some ways and yet the same where it counts! Jon is now a mentor in our special needs living unit, doing servant ministry like he was hoping to. He's also enrolling in a Bible college to pursue his interrupted education. Cesar, after 18 years without a major infraction, was sent to the "hole" for two weeks and is now at Tip 1 status, getting out of his noisy cell one hour a day during which he eats, showers, and stops by the chapel briefly. He was humiliated but responded well to my comment, "Be careful what you pray for! Six months ago God was calling you to minister to the guys in the "hole" and look where you are." He's become our "man on the inside." Kurt continues to work steadily in Custom Woods like Jon (and Cesar did...) and I found out he has Amish ancestry—his grandmother.

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Visiting FreeIndeed

Several congregants from Resurrection Lutheran attended a worship service with the FreeIndeed prison ministry led by Pastor Jerry Collell. We were joined in worship by several local visitors from Anamosa, and about twenty prisoners incarcerated there. The inmates we met were genuinely pleased to hear we had traveled all the way from Ankeny to worship with them.

Assisting in the service was a worship team of seven inmates who provided guitar accompaniment and sang. During the service, we sang hymns, listened to scripture, heard Pastor Jerry's sermon, and took communion together. The New Testament reading was Acts 16:16-34, which described when Paul and Silas were imprisoned for casting a spirit from a slave girl. According to the Bible passage, their fellow prisoners heard Paul and Silas praying and singing during the night. A violent earthquake shook the prison, opened doors, and broke their chains. The jailer was about to kill himself when Paul told him, "Do not harm yourself for we are all here." The prisoners' remarkable decision not to flee turned the jailer's heart. For those of us inside the stone walls of Anamosa, this scripture resounded deeply.

This visit and worship experience reminded me how vital the FreeIndeed ministry is to the inmates at Anamosa. It offers them hope and renewal, spiritual fellowship, and community. It creates a spiritual connection to the outside world, to the worldwide Christian body, and to the love and mercy of God. "When we are set free from the bondage to sin and evil we truly are free indeed, regardless of the other shackles we may have to carry." (Rev. Dr. David Stevens) All of us who attended that day were moved by the experience, and touched by the grace shared. We vowed to return.

—David Foster, guest worshipper from Resurrection



Visitors from Resurrection in Ankeny, with Pastor Jerry, during their post-visit lunch and debrief.

Thank you for your generous support of this ministry!

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