

## **Modern Slavery: Kids Making a Difference**

Labor Day Sunday, September 1, 2013  
Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento  
Rev. Roger Jones and friends

### Hymns:

#210, Wade in the Water; #118, This Little Light of Mine;  
#151, I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free.

Special Music: You Raise Me Up, piano/voice by Eric Stetson.  
Somewhere Over the Rainbow, piano/voice by Rachel Kang

Pastoral Prayer followed by Silent Meditation by Petra (Mom of some of our presenters)

We're going to take a few minutes at this time to step back and reflect, pray or meditate – whatever you are comfortable with. I find it easiest to put my thoughts in the form of communicating with something beyond myself, which most people call “God.” As I speak-out my thoughts join along in your own thinking and feeling.

Dear God,

Thank you for life and for the fact that we live on this earth and get to be with one another. Thank you for all those who have shared joys and sorrows this morning. We celebrate with those who shared good news and we want to help carry the burdens of those who have sorrows.

On this Labor Day weekend we thank You for the opportunity to work and contribute to making the world a better place. Thank you for both paid and unpaid labor – whether that be doing home improvement projects, raising children, caring for an elderly parent, having a career, or volunteering at church. Thank you for all the ways in which we can use our skills to help others. Thank you for making each one of us unique with different talents and abilities that match different needs in our world.

Even as labor can be a gift, we know that it can also be abused. As we talk about slave labor today help us to listen and understand. Open our hearts to feel their pain but also guard our hearts that we do not become engulfed in sadness. Give us a vision for a different future, fill us with hope, and give us the courage to do what needs to be done.

Thank you God,  
Amen

### Roger's Sermon Part 1

One hundred fifty years ago last January, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. He ordered the Union army to obtain the freedom of all people held in bondage in the states in rebellion against the Union. Hence, ending slavery became an explicit goal of the ongoing war.

Fifty years ago last Wednesday, A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, Martin Luther King, Jr., and many others led the nonviolent March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. King's “I Have a Dream” address is one of the best-loved speeches in history. We can see the Civil

Rights Movement as a continued struggle to undo the legacy of slavery, to complete the liberation begun by the Civil War, and to reverse the built-in patterns of inequity and oppression.

Today, around the world, nearly every country has outlawed slavery. Nearly every country, however, is a home to slavery. An estimated 27 million human beings are held against their will by other human beings. Men, women, and children are made to labor without pay for the benefit of others, not for the benefit of their own lives or their families. Other people treat them like property, deny their freedom of movement.

It's hard to imagine, but it happens.

With children in the service we will avoid a discussion of certain types of slavery, but the adults involved in the service can answer questions later, or direct you to relevant websites. But here is a partial explanation.

□ One form of slavery is called bonded labor, or debt bondage. This means you have to work for someone to pay off a debt or loan. You could be working the rest of your life, and then your children have to take over the loan. This happens in all countries, including those in Asia and Africa.

Many bonded laborers don't know that what's happening to them is against the law. In poor and remote areas of India, for example, tribal people and other minorities are told they have to work without pay in order to pay off loans. Often this happens to farm and factory workers, but it happens to maids and servant boys and girls as well. Their bosses charge high interest rates on the debt, so instead of being paid off, the debt grows.

The common factor in all cases of slavery is the desperate poverty of a person or a family. This makes it easier to trick them. For example, a so-called employment-agent will tell a family that he can find work for their child in a distant city, and the agent will send the child's wages back home to the village. Children end up working in clothing factories, brick factories, brothels, and on farms. Yet often they do not get paid, and no money goes to their families back home. They have been tricked, and they are trapped.

In a poor family an older sister, or a mother or a father may leave their village or even leave their country for the promise of a job. The person making that promise will charge a fee, and later will say the worker must work off the debt before they can leave their jobs. The boss charges interest on the debt, and he charges for housing and food, even if it's bad housing and not much food.

Slavery happens also in this country, and in California, even in Sacramento. First, I want to say that you and I are not at risk for this kind of treatment. Laws protect all of us from debt bondage here. Violence is against the law, and the law is enforced. Most of the people in California who are made to work without pay have come here from other countries, often as victims of trafficking. They work on large farms, in people's private homes, in brothels and in other places hidden from view.

Far from their home country or family or friends, they also may be isolated by not being able to speak English. They are unaware that laws protect them, and unable to say the right words to ask for help. They may experience threats or beatings by those who keep them. In some other countries, some of the police are part of the slavery system, so somebody here from overseas may fear asking our police for help.

I began learning about all of this when I co-hosted a meeting of the Kids' Freedom Club here at UUSS a few months ago.

I'd like to invite Aliya, Ben and their friends and siblings to speak to us about it.

## Kids' Presentation

ALIYA, age 10:

Welcome. I'm glad you came today. It is such an honor to be able to share with you today. You coming today means a lot to us and to people in slavery.

We started the Freedom Club when we heard about a girl named Vivienne Harr who ran a lemonade stand to help free slaves.

When I first heard about slavery I felt surprised because I thought slavery had ended hundreds of years ago. I felt a rush of energy telling me that I needed to do something. I also felt very sad that people were doing this. It seemed very unrealistic to think that slavery was still going on. Of course I wasn't the only one who felt this couldn't be true. One of my friends who was in the club told her teacher about it and he didn't believe her. She told him that he should go online so that he could see if it was true or not. He did, and figured out that it was true so he told the rest of the class about it.

I've always wanted to do something so when I learned about slavery, I knew this would be what I wanted to do to help the world.

So we invited other kids and youth from UUSS to join us for our first meeting. Next we got our supplies, and lastly we had our club. Some of the activities that we've done are doing a coin collection drive, watching videos to learn about slavery today, and making crafts to spread the word. Next we plan on doing a rummage sale.

BEN, age 8:

Do you remember when you learned about slavery in school? You learned about all the abolitionists who helped to free the slaves. Don't you remember Harriet Tubman, William Wilberforce, Fredrick Douglas, and Abraham Lincoln? If you had lived back then, then I know you would have been an abolitionist.... and you can be now.

One of the things we do in the Freedom Club is learn about slavery and about freedom. We want to share with you 10 very important facts that we have learned about slavery.

[KIDS READ CARDS ALOUD AND HOLD THEM UP]

1. Slavery is forced to work without pay, under threat of violence and unable to walk away.
2. There are 27 million slaves in the world today – more than any other time in human history.
3. Slavery is illegal everywhere, but it happens everywhere.
4. Most slaves today are in Asian and African countries.
5. There are many words that slave holders use to avoid the word “slavery” – debt bondage, bonded labor, attached labor and restavec.
6. Slaves work in mines, brothels, fields, restaurants and homes... anywhere slaveholders can feed their greed.
7. \$90 is the average cost for a human slave around the world.
8. Human trafficking is the modern-day slave-trade.
9. At least 14,500 slaves are brought into the U.S. every year.
10. We can stop slavery in 25 years if everyone plays a role... including us.

ALIYA

Everybody is happy when they get freed. They are unhappy when they are enslaved, just like the locks on the front of your bulletin.

In one of our Freedom Club meetings, we had two posters. On one of them we wrote how we would feel if we were enslaved. Here are some of the words we used to describe slavery:

Lonely  
Caged  
Malnourished  
Tricked  
Lost  
Mad  
Bad  
Sad  
Ignored  
Beaten  
Longing  
Afraid  
Sick  
Unhappy  
Physically and mentally hurt  
Scared  
Tired  
Depressed  
Hated  
Worked out  
Everything is unfair  
Broken heart  
Not cared for  
Wanting to be free  
Upset  
Sore

#### BEN

There are slaves all over the world and there are great organizations that are doing great work all over the world to free them. We partner with "Free the Slaves" which is a non-profit organization that helps to free slaves. They only need \$94 to free a slave. They use this money for lawyers, social workers, activists and teaching people that they are not allowed to be in slavery. So far we have been able to free 3 slaves!

#### ALIYA

Would you like to be part of ending slavery? We can end slavery in 25 years if everybody does their part. My hope is that everybody helps so that we can actually end slavery in 25 years or even before that. I want my children to live in a world that doesn't have slavery.

After the service there will be a "Connection" table on the patio where you can fill-out a card if you would like to join us to make a difference. There are lots of other ways you can help, such as by donating to free a slave, bringing used items for the rummage sale, or helping us to start a Facebook page. As a token of our appreciation for making a commitment we have made free gifts for you that you can choose from. As a club whenever we raise enough money to free a slave, we open one of our locks. (Wyatt to demonstrate)

You can also stop by our lemonade stand for some yummy lemonade and free time to chat and ask questions. If you are a kid or a teen-ager, we would love for you to join our club. We meet once a month and we meet next Sunday, right after church.

In one of our Freedom Club meetings we talked about what it would feel like to be freed from slavery. These are the words we wrote:

Can get paid

Nothing can stop you

Good

Safe

Real

Happy

Loved

Can't stand still

Better

Awesome

Fantastic

Full

Overjoyed

Fulfilled

Thank you for listening and we hope that these words of freedom inspire you this morning.

### Roger's Sermon, Part 2

This information can be overwhelming, can't it? It's disheartening to find out about modern slavery--to realize that 27 million adults and children feel trapped instead of feeling free.

And with so many people trafficked or enslaved around the world, we realize that this problem is not the singular sin of a few bad people. Organized crime networks in the United States and other countries are involved in the modern slave trade, or human trafficking. In villages and cities in poorer nations, slavery is aided by corrupt public servants. And in most cases, slavery is the inevitable result of the desperate poverty, and of the global trade systems and economic structures that have, around the world, thrown more families into poverty than they have relieved from poverty.

As a member of the human family, when I think about the greed and cruelty and the suffering, it can really get me down.

But then I think about those who are not letting it get them down. They are standing up. They are making a difference.

Here's a story: When he was eight years old, a boy in India named Keshav Nankar had to pay off a loan owed by his father to the owner of the land where they lived. Keshav worked every day from 6 AM to 10 PM. No pay. No education. No play time.

At age 17 he got married, and borrowed less than \$100 from the landowner for the cost of his wedding. He and his wife worked three more years for the man. Every year the boss would deduct money from the loan for Keshav's work, but then he added interest charges that would make the loan amount BIGGER. Keshav sold his father's two goats to pay off the loan, finally. Yet the boss would not let him go.

So why didn't he run away? Keshav said: "My whole family lived in the village. We were all so scared of the man that no one would even think of that. If I had tried to work somewhere else, the landowner would have come and said, 'This is my man.' So we couldn't do anything."

But in several parts of India, over the last few decades, groups of poor people have come together to stand up. As organized unions, they demand that police and government officials honor the law. Thanks to a union called Sanghatana, Keshav and his wife achieved their freedom. Then Keshav got involved in that union, and later became its chairperson. As a leader, he now helps others get free of bonded labor. (Mitchell April 1, 2008, 5) In India, organizations like that receive money from the endowment of the Unitarian Universalist Holdeen India Program. That endowment is managed by our denomination.<sup>1</sup>

The Indian border state of West Bengal is a transit point for human trafficking. People are tricked into leaving or are even abducted from nearby states as well as from Nepal and Bangladesh, and moved around India to work. Greedy and corrupt police, politicians, and judges look the other way. But there is a grassroots women's union there. It's called SMS, and it has a network of locations in cities and villages. It has 28,000 members! When judges or the police fail to act, hundreds of women blockade government offices in a nonviolent protest. They shame the officials into acting.

Once a young woman named Mukta left her village to work in India's capital city. A job placement agency put her to work, but her family didn't receive any money. Her mother asked the union for help. Its activists hunted down the labor contractor who had sent Mukta to Delhi. Threatening to force the police to act, the women scared him into getting the placement agency in Delhi to send her back home. Next, SMS pursued recovery of the money Mukta had earned and was owed. (Mitchell, Bringing the Victims Home: February 16, 2009, 3). SMS also has been a grantee of our UU Holdeen India Program.

In the United States, women from the Philippines have worked as nannies, housekeepers, and cooks for all kinds of people. Some are mistreated, or not paid all they have earned. This is called wage theft. Some of them work for well-off diplomats from their home country. Seems like nice work, yet many of these women are held against their will in the houses where they work. Their bosses are protected from the law by diplomatic immunity. In fear of losing their immigration status, the women are shy to flee or protest.

Yet in the year 2000 an organization of Filipina domestic workers formed in New York City. Now with 800 members, its board of nine women range in age from 20 to 60. All are domestic workers. It's called Damayan. The volunteers and staff offer trainings called "know your rights." They host legal clinics, give health services at health fairs, and help workers in situations of wage theft and trafficking. These creative women use lobbying, street theater, lawsuits and protests to bring attention to unfairness. Damayan's organizing has caused the loss of diplomatic immunity enjoyed by abusive employers. Damayan has received money from its members and their many fundraising events, and also a modest amount from the Unitarian Universalist Fund for a Just Society, a grants panel on which I serve.

You heard the kids mention [Free the Slaves](http://www.freetheslaves.net).<sup>2</sup> They will have lemonade and water for us at a table on the patio after church, and will ask each of us to make a commitment to do something about slavery. They've made gifts to thank us for helping out. One way we can help is by giving money to Free the Slaves.

You may wonder: How does Free the Slaves get people out of slavery? It's challenge. We talked about it in the Kids' Freedom Club. "Why don't the slaves walk away?"

"Why don't we go in with guns to rescue the slaves?"

Well, the approach needs to be a bit more inter-disciplinary than that. If they ran away from their small village, their family might be in danger. Just pay to buy a person's freedom is

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.uua.org/international/holdeen/>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.freetheslaves.net>

no guarantee either. Their boss could abduct them again, or someone else could trick them into a debt.

Free the Slaves first tries to show slaves that their suffering is against the law. Then it can help them get job training or an education, find them work that pays, and maybe find a home in a different location. It can bring pressure and attention to bear on the police and local politicians to make sure the person is protected. It's a lot of work, but it makes a difference, at an average cost of \$94.

Edward Everett Hale, a leading American Unitarian in the 1800s, had this to say:

I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.

So... What can we do? We can end slavery. The institution of American slavery was outlawed 150 years ago, but not without centuries of struggle.

Sustained effort brought the truth to light, brought growing demands for change, and finally brought freedom. We can end global slavery. As consumers, we can demand slavery-free products. As business owners and investors, we can clean up company supply chains. As governments and citizens, we can toughen the enforcement of laws and protect the poor. As donors and as advocates, we can help to make sure that vulnerable people learn about their rights. We can help enslaved people take a stand for freedom. We can learn, we can give, and we can spread the word.

As you heard, in a meeting of our Kids' Freedom Club, after talking about slavery, they brainstormed answers to the question: "How would we feel if we became free from slavery?"

And the words that they said were these:

Can get paid  
Nothing can stop you  
Good  
Safe  
Real  
Happy  
Loved  
Can't stand still  
Better  
Awesome  
Fantastic  
Full  
Overjoyed  
Fulfilled

So may it feel, and so may it be, for everybody, for every child and every adult on this earth. So may it be for every member of the whole human family. Amen.

#### Works Cited

Mitchell, Derek. "Bringing the Victims Home:." Institute for Contemporary World Affairs: The Crane-Rogers Foundation, Washington, D.C., February 16, 2009.

Mitchell, Derek. "Unremiting Struggle: A Union Battles for Justice on the Edges of Mumbai." Institute of Current World Affairs: The Crane-Rogers Foundation, Washington, D.C., April 1, 2008.

## Friends of Freedom

I want to help bring an end to slavery through the following...

- Bringing someone out of slavery by giving \$9.40 per month for ten months
- Telling two friends about modern-day slavery and encouraging them to visit: [www.freetheslaves.net](http://www.freetheslaves.net)
- Hosting a Freedom gathering (at my house, school, workplace, faith community, etc.)
- Volunteering two hours to help with organizing and planning Friends of Freedom activities
- Bringing in items for the rummage sale
- Signing-up for a newsletter to learn more
- I am a junior high or high school student and would like to help with the club
- My child may be interested in joining the Freedom Club.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

### Friends of Freedom Membership Card



*I will help to end slavery.*

[www.freetheslaves.net](http://www.freetheslaves.net)

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