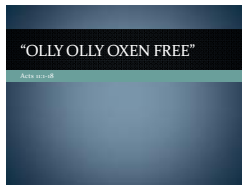


“Olly Olly Oxen Free”

Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6; Acts 11:1-18; John 13:31-35

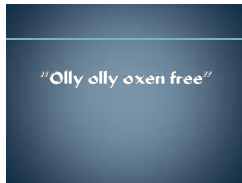


INTRODUCTION:

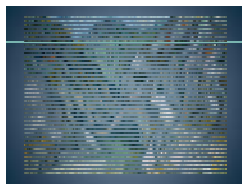
Today's service based on the lectionary readings for May 2

Read through the passages

Discovered the theme of the texts: “Olly olly oxen free.”



Someone suggested this art for the texts: “The Ravine” – van Gogh



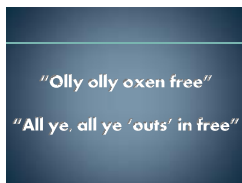
Let me explain:

First, “Olly olly oxen free”

“Hide and go seek”

“Kick the can”

From “All ye, all ye ‘outs’ in free.”



Second, about the painting “The Ravine”



2 figures in the center of the picture
The “outs” are coming in from the ravine (leave picture)

So the theme for today’s texts is: “Olly olly oxen free.” Let’s see how that’s so.

WHAT?

Psalm 148 – all creation can/should praise the LORD

He created them. He sustains them.
They exist because He makes it so. He is worthy of their praise.
In a sense He makes it possible for them to come in, to be free, to be with Him.

“Olly olly oxen free.”

Revelation 21:1-6:

Key verse is verse 3: “The home of God is among mortals, He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.”

God makes it possible for mortals like us to be his people. He makes it possible for the “outs” like us to come in, to be free, to be with Him.

“Olly olly oxen free.”

Acts 11:1-18:

Key verse is verse 18: “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.”

God moves beyond the apostles' and believers' notion of what it means to be the chosen people. He makes it possible for folks who are regarded as religious outcasts to come in, to be free, to be with Him.

Gentiles – people who were not Jews: “the nations” “the ethnics.” Considered outcasts by the Jews and early Jewish believers.

Who are some of today's outcasts? _____; _____;
_____;

Fill in the blank: “God has given even to the _____ the repentance that leads to life.”

“Olly olly oxen free.”

SO WHAT?

Essential to remember that God has said – and is still saying – to everyone:

“All ye, all ye ‘outs’ – in free.”

But there's something different about how God has said – and is saying – those words. There's a twist on how He's “playing the game.”

When we play “hide and go seek,” it's the folks who are still hiding have to come in. They have to make the move if they want to be free.

When we play “kick the can,” it's the kids who haven't been caught yet who have to run in to the center. They have to come back to the rest of the group. It's their move.

However, when God says to us and all of creation, “olly olly oxen free,” He doesn't wait for us to make the first move. He comes to us. He “finds” us in our hiding places. He “catches” us in all our running around. He intersects our lives and says, “All ye, all ye ‘outs’ – in free,” and waits for us to respond.

Because God comes to us:

All creature and creation sing His praise – Alleluia!
He dwells with us. We're His people. He is with us – Alleluia!
Even Gentiles like us can repent and have eternal life – Alleluia!

This is illustrated in van Gogh's painting. In my mind, the two figures in the middle of the painting, the ones walking out of the ravine, are actually one person being led by the other. The person in front went into the ravine to find the one who was lost, the one who was hiding. Having found the on-the-outs-one, the two are walking out together. The one walking behind is now free.

NOW WHAT?

There is one more scripture passage for this week. It's John 13:31-35 [read].

In my mind, this story is another take on God's version of "olly olly oxen free." Key verse is verse 34: "Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another."

God has set the pace. He has set the example. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, so that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) And he calls us to do the same. "Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another."

His word to us is this:

We're not to wait for the other to make the move.
We're not to wait for the other to come in from their "hiding place."
We're not to wait for the other to stop their "running around."
We're to go, we're to give, we're to love, we're to say to all those folks who make up our lives: "All you, all you 'outs' – in free."

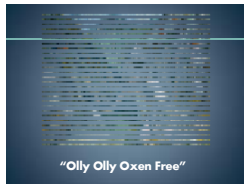
In his book, *Wishful Thinking*, Frederick Buechner writes:

In the Christian sense, love is not primarily an emotion but an act of the will. When Jesus tells us to love our neighbors, he is not telling us to love them in the sense of responding to them with a cozy emotional feeling. You can as well produce a cozy

emotional feeling on demand as you can a yawn or a sneeze. On the contrary, he is telling us to love our neighbors in the sense of being willing to work for their well-being even if it means sacrificing our own well-being to that end . . .” (54).

“This is love: not that we loved, but that he loved us . . .” (1 John 4:10)

So God’s word to us today is to be our word to others today:



“All ye, all ye ‘outs’ – in free.”

Amen.