

WITH FREEDOM COMES RESPONSIBILITY

Fourth of July! That day is a special day in this country. We get together with family and friends and barbecue, play games and watch fireworks. Most of us don't really think about what the day means, except as a holiday and a time to have fun. July 4, 1776 was the day the Declaration of Independence from England was adopted by the thirteen colonies in the new world. It is a day that we celebrate our freedom; a freedom most of us take for granted. Yes, we take it for granted. Those of us born in this country really don't think about the freedoms we enjoy. However, people who come here from other countries where they might not have the same kinds of freedom, truly appreciate what we native born take for granted.

Not only do we take our freedom for granted, but most of us didn't do anything to earn our freedom. Except for the veterans among us who fought in all the wars of recent decades, the majority of us live our lives enjoying all kinds of freedom: to live where we want, to eat what we want, to believe what we want, to say what we want, to worship where we want, without doing anything to earn these rights and privileges. But with these rights and privileges comes a responsibility. We have a responsibility to do no harm, not to keep others from exercising their rights and privileges. We have a responsibility to treat others with respect, to be fair and just. With freedom comes responsibility.

The same is true in our faith life. In John 8:34, Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin." We are free from the bondage of sin because of what Jesus did for us. A declaration of independence was adopted upon His death and resurrection, independence from Satan and his power and influence over us. John 8 continues, "The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the son continues for ever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." We are free! We have done nothing to earn this freedom, just as we have done nothing to earn the freedoms we enjoy in this country. The freedom we enjoy in this country was fought for by those who came before us and in some instances is still being fought for now. But our freedom from sin, Satan and his power, is a gift. It is God's gift of grace. Grace, that love that the Lord gives us even though we don't deserve it. It is the love that says you are forgiven for all your sins, past, present and future. It is the love that wipes the slate clean as if we had never sinned. Ephesians 2:8 says, "For it is by grace you have been saved..." Grace is the love that moved God to give His only beloved son, Jesus, to suffer on the cross and die. Grace is the love of God in action and Jesus is the expression of His grace. Because of God's grace we are no longer slaves to sin, but are free to have eternal life. With freedom comes responsibility!

Yes, we are free, but we also have a responsibility in that freedom. Our responsibility includes bringing others to Christ by telling them of the kingdom of God and the freedom that knowing Christ brings.

In our gospel lesson today, Jesus sends out pairs of disciples to every town and village He intended to visit. He tells them to take nothing with them and warns them that he is sending them out among the wolves. What does this mean for us today?

Our responsibility is to go to the places where God intends to be. How do we know where that is? Jesus says in verse 2, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers

are few..." We city folks may not be as familiar with what harvest means. The harvest is the crop that was planted and is ready to be picked. In other words, Jesus is telling us that the seeds of faith have already been planted and there are those outside of our walls who are ready to be brought in. He wants us to share the good news with those outside of our walls who do not have a church home. We do not have to go to a foreign country to find people who have heard of Christ, but don't know Christ. We can step out of our front doors, in our own communities, even in our own families and find people who hunger for the good news of freedom that we can bring. It is our responsibility to share with others how Christ freed us from slavery to sin. The harvest is plentiful! Where are the laborers, the workers?

Jesus sends the disciples in pairs and warns them that they will be like "lambs among the wolves." In other words, we are not to do this work alone but with others for mutual support and encouragement. As individuals and as congregations, we are not to work in isolation.

1 Peter 5:8 tells us, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." Wolves are the enemies of lambs as the devil is the enemy of Christ's followers. Therefore, we should not be surprised when trouble comes. The world is Satan's territory. It is where he has power. Satan will do his best to keep us off track. To keep us from doing the work Christ has given us to do. Working together, we can be aware and vigilant, while staying focused on our task.

Jesus tells the disciples to take nothing with them--no provisions at all. The disciples are not to be weighed down with a lot of stuff while they travel, but are to travel light. The message for us is to not let "stuff" get in the way of doing ministry. We can find all kinds of distractions or excuses for why we can't do ministry: not enough money or people, no pastor or youth minister. These are distractions that keep us from the responsibility of sharing the kingdom of God. If we trusted that God will provide all that we need when we need it, we could do so much more.

Our responsibility is to share the good news, not to make people accept it. We often feel discouraged because only a few people show up at some program or ministry we start. We are often faced with rejection. People just don't want to hear what we have to say. Jesus tell His followers in verse 11 to wipe the dust of that place off of their feet and move on. He doesn't tell them to count how many people came and listened to them. We so often get caught up in a numbers game--how many members do we have, how much money are they giving, what's the budget for this or that ministry. In this text, Jesus says nothing about how to measure their success. He just tells them to do ministry. Let's just do the ministry and not worry about all these other things. God will provide what we need, if we first seek His approval of our plans. We are to go where God intends to go, not wherever we want to go.

Freedom is a precious gift. We can celebrate our secular freedom, like we do on the 4th of July. And we can celebrate our divine freedom, like we do in worship on Sunday mornings. We can rejoice in the knowledge that we are free from sin. We, as Christians, cannot separate our secular freedom from our divine freedom. In both, we

have a responsibility. A responsibility to live a Christ like life. I'll end with a quote from St. Teresa of Avila.

“Christ has no body on earth but yours;
no hand but yours; no feet but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of
Christ looks out to the world.
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good.
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless others now.”

God's Work, Our Hands--Our Responsibility.