

FREEDOM

Sermon Preached on July 3, 2011

By Rev. Dr. Deborah Lind-Schmitz

Key Verses: Matthew 11:28-30

²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

On this Independence weekend, firecrackers, flags and red/white and blue clothes celebrate our country's birth. Honestly, I'm very proud to be a Presbyterian around these holidays. We can claim many of our founders, including Presbyterian John Witherspoon, the only clergyman to sign the declaration of Independence. This “High Son of Liberty” not only served as the first moderator of our Presbyterian General Assembly, he also served this country as a congressional representative. I know many of you are experts in fields of history, political science and law, so I'll not venture further than an awareness of our common representative governance.

What do you think of when you hear the word- Freedom? Freedom to vote, freedom of religion, freedom to have a differing opinion and not get shot. An enduring symbol of freedom welcomed oppressed, threatened and enslaved people as they entered the United States of America after its dedication Oct.28, 1886. The Statue of Liberty, a gift from France was laden with symbolism, broken chains at her feet remind me of the slaves recently freed during the Civil War. The torch in her right hand represented Progress, lighting the way in more biblical terms. In Liberty's left hand is a tablet, designed to represent the Law. However, the famous sculptor, Bartholdi, so admired the United States' constitutional governance that he chose to inscribe JULY IV MDCCLXXVI" on the tablet, thus associating the date of the country's Declaration of Independence with the concept of liberty (Wikipedia). Around 1882, many artists and poets were commissioned to participate in the fundraising efforts to complete the statue.

One poet, Emma Lazarus declined the invitation because of her intense involvement with Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe. The anti-Semitic conditions forced them into less than desirable conditions. Emma Lazarus was able to express her empathy in the sonnet, “The New Colossus”.
"Give me your tired, your poor----- Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free"

Hundreds of thousand immigrants were welcomed by those words and Lady Liberty as they passed through Ellis Island. Many were able to breathe freedom, although we know history keeps us humble.

II. “Come all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”,

words spoken almost two thousand years ago gave rest for the soul. Christ's invitation is as universal as our interpretation and as parochial as its context. However, the freedom and liberation it offers is spiritually timeless. Traveling along the Sea of Galilee, Jesus offered

freedom from physical ailments and spiritual disease with varying responses. In the Gospel passage of Matthew, Jesus offers rest and respite for weary souls which might have well been his dusty disciples and followers. The frustration may have finally overtaken them. Understandably so. The people of Chorazim and Bethsaida rejected Jesus' message and signs of wonder. Their ears were stopped and hearts were hardened to God's message of grace. Prophets had all tried to break through their defensive walls and hardened hearts. And what had come of it? Prophets were rejected, John the Baptizer was beheaded and now Jesus was in danger.

So, Jesus explains the circumstance with a poetic parable- What shall I compare this generation?

It is like children in a marketplace. They call out come and join in the dance of the flute and are ignored. "We played the flute for you and you did not dance; we wailed and you did not mourn."

III. Jesus' message, Christ's presence was as real as the music in the marketplace. People ignored Him then and now. Yet, the offer still stands. Christ is here if we recognize him. Listen for the music which tunes itself to our hearts and lives. The flute image is not as colossal as the Liberty statues of Rhodes and NY harbor. However, the message of God's liberty is as assessable and immediate as a song in our hearts. As a tune that drifts into your soul to comfort and inspire. Listen for the message God has to liberate and lift your spirit. For, the freedom Christ offers is not restricted by national boundaries or dictatorships. The freedom Christ offers is limited by our generation's walls of our skeptics, doubt and rejection. Wm Willimon predicted more than 10 years ago, before the Twin Towers burned in sight of the statue of Liberty and all the world. He predicted that the freedom this generation will seek would be freedom from anxiety and fear. The Peace that the Risen Christ gave his disciples lifted their fears and gave them courage to face the future without him. The Holy Spirit which remained with them and is yours today, can bring freedom to your souls. As you already heard in the II Corinthians 3 reading. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" It is for you and I, discover how that freedom comes to us and how the Spirit transforms us day by day.

So, "come all who are weary, all who are carrying a heavy burden" and lay it down here. Here, in prayer. For Christ, the liberator of souls will take those sins, fears, troubles and doubts and give you a lighter load. Where the Lord is there is freedom, to break chains of oppression and set the captive free. Today as we celebrate baptism and renewal of our own baptismal vows, listen for the joyful sounds of grace freely given. Today as we gather around the Lord's Table, let your heart freedom ring in your souls. So, join in the dance of freedom and enjoy the fireworks of liberty, for we believe Christ has set us free.

II Corinthians 3: 17-18

¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.¹⁸ And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Matthew 11:16-30

¹⁶“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,¹⁷‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’;¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.

²⁵At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants;²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸“*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*²⁹*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*³⁰*For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*”
