

7-3-22

Sermon- Independence, Interdependence Day

Scripture- Galatians 5:13-18, CTW- Ps97

Hymns- 759, 757, God Bless America

Theme- This weekend many people are celebrating Independence Day in a variety of ways. Many have taken extra time off from work and are traveling. Some are taking a special opportunity to visit family. Others just stay home and perhaps watch a patriotic marathon on TV. There is a lot of BBQ going on all across the country. There are fireworks, parades and all kinds of celebrations which have become tradition in the US.

I. But we need to remember that we celebrate this holiday because of what happened in 1776, and believe me, that was directly related to the Founding Father's belief in our Creator God!

We celebrate the actions of people we only know about because of books, and unfortunately those books are disappearing from the classrooms just like Bibles did in the 60's.

We celebrate the actions of people that lived without electricity, without regular mail service, without Super Wal-Mart.

A. What a stark existence to be willing to fight for!

We celebrate that these people had the gumption, or gall or courage and faith to break the existing hold of Europe on these wilderness colonies that had struggled to survive and were being choked by rules and unfair burdens by the king of England.

Our Founding Fathers were pretty specific in the Declaration of Independence. If you read through the document you find oppression, abuse, removal of rights, false justice and punishment. You find a precisely stated set of charges against the

King and their justification for separation from the rule of a King. Their charges are that the King is not fulfilling his responsibility to be a protector of the people and worse that he is abusing his distant subjects.

Their declaration was to break free of the strangle hold of a tyrant.

B. I find it interesting that we celebrate the day of declaration not the day it was actually achieved.

The truth is that if they had lost their struggle we would not be celebrating at all this weekend and Monday would not be a holiday. We would be subjects of Queen Elizabeth, something along the lines of Canada, our friends to the north.

Today all those years later, we do celebrate the winning of the prize that was worth everything to the men that would sign the document. Something worth risking wealth and even life to gain.

II. So, what is the Christian comparison?

A. The scripture we heard this morning is talking about freedom- freedom from Mosaic Law. The law is described elsewhere as being something that helped to identify what sin is, and how to live a life honorable to God.

However, too many people, especially the religious leaders, used the Law as a tool of control. They used it for power and position and separation. They used and abused the law as control and power in the name of God.

Paul declares that because of Jesus Christians have freedom from the law. He tells the churches in Galatia that they are called by God through Jesus to be free.

The people of Paul's day suffered persecution and hardship which increases as they became Christians. The community made it tough to live a new faith. They were not welcome in the Jewish

community unless they adhered to the law. This meant big changes for the Gentile men.

B. It had to be hard to celebrate the freedom that Paul encourages. The existing culture did not understand them and the Jews were angered by them simply because they had different rules.

It was very confusing for them. They had already broken from their old traditions. They were trying to figure out the ins and outs of this new faith.

They had lots of questions and pressures to bow down to and it appears in scripture that one of the most logical was that you needed to become a Jew to become a Christian. The pressure was to live under the law as a first concern.

Paul insists that it is not true.

Paul thought that the Law was being required as the means to cover sin, A tool provided by God to offer a substitute to pay for sin against God.

But the people of the day still had the problem of Sin to deal with, the covering the paying a price became something to factor into your budget. They rationalized it all by saying: "Well I expect to sin **this much** this year so I will need **this number and type of animals**, to pay off that debt. The peoples' lives were not changed by fines at all. They planned for it and moved on.

III. Today we may do the same. We see the removal of the law as a discount on getting right with God. We pray for forgiveness and go out and commit the same sins time and time again. Rinse and repeat, rinse and repeat!

A. Hindsight is so good. Today we can look at United States history and find the investment made by people so

long ago was worth it. It is great to be free. It is fantastic that I can pretty much do what I want and say what I want.

The first sentence in the Declaration of Independence is a whopper. It is long and I imagine that it would make an English teacher wince. It sets the stage for the rest of the document, basically saying when things are bad enough people have to take action and force a separation. The following is just a part of it:

“The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America, When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the **Laws of Nature and of Nature's God** entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation...(it goes on...)

The second sentence of the Declaration of Independence says:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their Safety and Happiness...”

246 years later we still enjoy the freedom that the Declaration of Independence calls for on behalf of the colonies and future citizens: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

B. This is my kind of place. I am so happy that God placed me here. I mean the United States, Pennsylvania, and the honor of serving as your pastor.

There are a lot of less comfortable places in this world where there is little or no freedom. Places where life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are a pipe dream.

For some on this planet the biggest goal is to just have life and there is little hope for much else.

However, there are still a few problems even here.

I am not complaining mind you. But we have a lot rules in this country. Traffic laws, home mortgages, traffic lights, speed limits, Income taxes, building codes, lines at the grocery store (where you now have to check out your own groceries) etc.

I could go on and on. It seems to be hard work to be in pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness when we have so many rules. When the economy is unstable. When things cost so much.

It seems to me that with freedom, comes a lot of other things which steal away that freedom.

IV. This is a key concept ...The freedom we have in our nation is cooperative. It is a union of people that agree to protect God given rights at a cost that is shared by the group.

A. The freedom we enjoy was not obtainable by one or two. It involved a community of like-minded people focused on one goal.

The freedom we have has limits that keep us from expressing our freedom at the expense of another.

In the Revolutionary War they fought to make something new. A new nation with new rules, rules that identified equality between people of different backgrounds.

And while not initially enforced there must be the acknowledgement of God given rights and freedoms for all people.

But let's look at this from a Christian perspective. We live in the greatest country in the world, the richest, the finest, and the seemingly most blessed.

B. In our scripture today, Paul tells the churches in Galatia that they were meant to be free. Free from slavery to sin; free from the obligation to keep the law which is impossible to keep.

However, even Paul explains that with freedom there are still rules and limits. He states rule 1 like this: "But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."

We cannot use our freedom to become immoral people!

We cannot use our freedom to abuse or use other people!

We cannot use our freedom to avoid obligations within the church.

We cannot use our freedom to sit around and do nothing!

Our Freedom is not a license to sin in any way. He also adds, we are to serve one another (within the Church) in Love.

Sounds like a limited version of freedom, sort of restrictive. But, it is not too expensive, and it is necessary for the people of God.

After all, the people at church are family by birth or holy adoption.

We all do things we don't necessarily like for family, at least occasionally.

The freedom we receive as Christians is limited to being good and loving others.

C. Paul then reminds them that "The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

There is that Love your neighbor thing. It starts in Leviticus, then Jesus is quoted in Matthew, Mark and Luke, then Paul and James both remind us several times.

Perhaps, we need to take the reminders as extra significance or importance. Paul reminds us that this one rule replaces the entire law.

This one rule if followed will set your life on an even footing and guide you in the right direction. Just take a minute to imagine if we would all follow it faithfully! This one rule will set us all free of all the little nuances and petty restrictions of the Law.

How do we demonstrate our love for ourselves?

When we are hungry, thirsty or sick we do something about it.

I guess there are a lot of things I do for myself, some are needs some are comforts some are just for fun. But I am worth all of it, right?

According to Paul, our neighbors are worth something as well. With freedom come obligations to our family, community, neighbors and even individuals along our path.

In this passage, Paul is writing to whoever is in the middle of a battle over salvation, and the freedom in Christ that comes with it.

Our forefathers in this nation recognized their lives were on the edge of slavery to the king. No rights or self-government and more and more loss of control over lives led them to declare their freedom against the all-powerful King of England.

They did not declare war on the king. They just severed their servitude to a life as servants to an unjust king. They changed their direction choosing the harder path of independence. A path of struggle and pain that would end in freedom like few in the colonies had ever known.

D. Paul tells his readers that for Christians that path is directed by the spirit. The battle he describes is between the sinful nature of every person and the guidance offered by the Holy Spirit.

He explains that the struggle is an individual battle within each person. The choice is being bound and controlled by a sinful nature or following the spirit toward ultimate freedom.

The struggle for independence is still going on today. In our nation the battle over religious freedom is growing and I would suggest that if we don't join the battle, we will continue to see our rights and freedoms trimmed and removed.

Our nation's founders obviously were much more open to the leading of God than many of our politicians and judges today.

God offers us the help we need, it is not always as easy to find as we want. It takes real effort and control to listen to the spirit. It takes even more to follow it's direction.

All Glory be to God! Amen? Let Us Pray...