

“Free Indeed”

1 Peter 2:9-17

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • July 2, 2017

Even after 241 years, freedom is still a pretty big deal in our country. I suspect that if you ask people what they're celebrating on the Fourth of July, most would say it has something to do with freedom. But what do we mean by freedom?

During the summer of 1776 the Continental Congress was meeting in the Pennsylvania Statehouse in Philadelphia to discuss declaring independence from Great Britain. On June 7th, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia brought a resolution from that state that read, "Resolved: That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved."

The Congress decided to hold off the vote and to recess for three weeks. Before the recess a committee of five delegates was created to draft a statement presenting to the world the colonies' case for independence. At the suggestion of Benjamin Franklin, one of the five, the committee asked Thomas Jefferson to write the first draft. With only a few changes suggested by Franklin and John Adams, the draft of the Declaration of Independence was presented to the Continental Congress.

The Congress reconvened on July 1st and the following day the Lee Resolution on Independence was adopted. The colonies had voted to be free from Great Britain. That evening by candlelight, John Adams wrote an emotional letter to his beloved wife Abigail. In that letter he said that Independence Day "ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Shows, Games, Sports, guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one end of this Continent to the other from this time forward forever more."

That certainly describes the way we celebrate today. The only thing he left out was the food. This Wednesday Americans will eat

more than 150 million hot dogs, many of them grilled by the more than 75 million people who plan to cook out.

It seems to me that many people in America today don't really understand what true freedom is or where it comes from. For example, just last Wednesday morning a man shouted "freedom" as he slammed his car into a granite monument on the grounds of the Arkansas State Capitol.

I think that if you asked most people what freedom means, they would answer something like, "freedom means I can do and say whatever I want whenever I want. Nobody can tell me what to do." I frequently hear people say, "Do what you want. It's a free country." But the Bible tells a different story. That understanding of freedom is not freedom at all. You see, you and I are sinful people. When we do whatever we want there's a good chance we're going to sin in the process. As Romans 8:5 says, "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires."

The point is that because of sin we're not free at all. In John 8:34 Jesus said, "everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." Doing whatever we want is not freedom at all, it's slavery. Just as destroying public property with your car will end up taking away your freedom. But in our passage this morning, Peter says, "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God." He is saying that in Christ we really are free and it's not because of anything WE'VE done to earn it. And that's the first thing I want us to understand today about freedom – it costs someone something. Freedom is never free.

We know from the history of our nation that freedom comes with a price. We only remain free because people are willing to sacrifice, many of them paying the ultimate price to keep us free. But we also know that freedom was God's idea in the first place. The

key event in the Old Testament is God freeing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. But even that doesn't compare to the freedom we have because of the sacrifice Jesus made for us. Again in Romans 8 we read, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."

This is what John Adams had in mind when he wrote that in addition to the parades and celebrations, Independence Day "ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty." You see, on Independence Day what we're really celebrating is freedom and as Adams and most of the other Founding Fathers understood, real freedom only comes through Jesus Christ.

That's why Peter says, "Live as free people." We are free. We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. He has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once we had not received mercy, but now we *have* received mercy.

However, there's something else that our passage this morning tells us about freedom. Freedom not only comes at a cost, it also comes with responsibility and Peter outlines three responsibilities that come with freedom from God. First, we are to change our behaviors. Verse 11 says, "abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God."

In other words, we are to stop doing sinful things and start doing good things. As Christians, when we live a distinctive life people notice and God uses *our* actions to bring others to freedom in Christ.

Second, Peter says we are to be subject to the government. God has ordained the role of the government to be to restrain evil, maintain law and order, and promote the welfare of the people. As such, according to the Bible, we are

to be subject to the laws enacted by our governments "for the Lord's sake." That doesn't mean that we shouldn't participate in the process or work to change bad laws. As David told us last week, we have a responsibility to be involved. As Abraham Lincoln said, ours is a "government of the people, by the people, and for the people." But it does mean that we aren't to go around breaking the law, claiming that we are free to do so. Verse 16 clearly instructs us not to use our freedom as a cover-up for evil.

It goes on to say, "rather, live as servants of God." So the third responsibility that Peter tells us comes with our freedom is the responsibility to serve. The Greek word used for "servant" in this verse is usually translated as "slave." The surprising thing we find about freedom, then, is that it's not only about what we're free from – sin and death – but what we're free for. Because we've been freed from the slavery of sin we are now free to serve God, and that means serving other people.

The Church is the Body of Christ on earth. That means that we're his hands and feet. When Jesus wants to minister to the sick or the poor or to those struggling with this life, we are the ones that He calls to handle it. That's what it means to be a Christian.

The founders of our nation understood that true liberty only comes through Christ and they set out to create a new kind of nation based on their belief. Let's take a look at what they said.

The Mayflower Compact tells us that the reason the Puritans sailed to North America: "Having undertaken, for the Glory of God, and advancements of the Christian faith..." In 1775, John Adams responded to a British soldier, "We have no sovereign but God and no king but Jesus." And in an 1813 letter to Thomas Jefferson, Adams wrote, "The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence were the general principles of Christianity."

Alexander Hamilton said that the US Constitution was "a system which, without the finger of God, never could have been suggested." In fact, James Madison conceived of the three branches of government inspired by

Isaiah 33:22. “For the LORD is our judge [judicial]; the LORD is our lawgiver [legislative]; the LORD is our king [executive]; he will save us.”

In 1781, Thomas Jefferson asked, “Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure, when we’ve removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of people that these liberties are the gifts of God?” This quote, by the way, is carved on the wall of the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, DC. And George Washington said, “To the distinguished character of patriot, it should be our highest glory to add the more distinguished character of Christian.”

John Quincy Adams, son of John and Abigail Adams, spoke often about the Christian founding of our country. In 1837 he said, “in the chain of human events, the birthday of the nation is indissolubly linked with the birth-day of the Saviour?” And in 1860 he wrote, “The highest, the transcendent glory of the American Revolution was this — it connected, in one indissoluble bond, the principles of civil

government with the precepts of Christianity.” Finally, the Liberty Bell is inscribed with the words of Leviticus 25:10, which says, “proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.”

Our nation is founded on the belief that God intends for all people to be free. But it’s founded on the understanding that with freedom also comes responsibility, the responsibility to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and to you’re your neighbor as yourself. Let me leave you with the words of Jesus we heard earlier: “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” This week as we celebrate our nation’s independence, remember our true freedom.

Amen.