

“Independence Day”  
Sermon given 7-4-10  
Immanuel Lutheran Church  
Neal Collins, Pastor

**Matthew 11:18-19, 25-30**

<sup>18</sup>For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; <sup>19</sup>the 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.” <sup>25</sup>At 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; <sup>26</sup>yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

**Celebrating Freedom**

Today we celebrate “freedom” with cookouts, firecrackers, and a three day weekend. Even though it is a celebration of freedom, for many this is a time of anxiety. Jesus said, be not anxious about your life, what you will eat, drink, or wear. Yet, we are anxious people. You name it, we probably have some anxiety about it, from the recession, unemployment, Afganastan, aging, health, BP, oil spills, and maybe even wondering if there are some Russians living in our neighborhood for the past ten years. So, how do we even begin to talk about and celebrate “freedom”?

Freedom from the start is a struggle. The freedom we have and celebrate today was born in a struggle. The freedom God gives us is a struggle for us, inside and outside of ourselves.

**Freedom in America**

The idea of freedom in America started with a group of 13 men meeting and debating from 13 colonies. The debate was a struggle. At the conclusion of this debate, Reichard Henry Lee moved that, “All 13 colonies be free, independent states”. The motion was seconded by Adams with followed by a debate struggling with this notion of freedom. Someone called for the vote. By a vote of 7 to 6 the motion passed. Jefferson became the chairman of the ad hoc committee to draft the “Declaration of Independence”. The condition set for this draft was that it had to be approved by all 13 colonies. New York held back for two days. Finally on July 4, 1776, it was unanimous. All of us know these words... “We hold these truths to be \_\_\_\_\_, that all men are created \_\_\_\_\_, they are endowed by their Creator, with certain inalienable \_\_\_\_\_, among these rights are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.”

### **Freedom Born in Struggle**

Fifty-six men signed the Declaration of Independence. We need to remind ourselves that just signing it was only the beginning. The concluding words were, "With the firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor." They lived the words of the struggle for freedom. One of them said, "We hang alone or we hang together." Five of the signers were captured by the British and tormented before they were killed. Two of the signers lost their sons. Nine signers died from the wounds of the war in the struggle for freedom and independence.

When the fireworks are set off and the Roman Candles are lighting up the dark sky, they are symbols of the words of Frances Scott Key, "the rockets red glare gave proof through the night that our flag was still there." The British were attacking Fort Henry with "bombs bursting in the air". Scott, in 1814, penned our National Anthem with, "our flag is still there" on the back of a letter he had in his pocket, originally known as the Defense of Fort McHenry. Independence and freedom are born in struggle.

Three thousand years before Jefferson, Adams, and our Forefathers declared the separation from the English at the Continental Congress, another group of folks yearned for freedom and struggled. You know of this struggle with Moses' struggle with the Pharaoh to "let my people go." A thousand years later the Romans oppressed the children of Israel, and Jesus came to bring "Good News" to the captive. Freedom starts in the Older Testament with creation. God gave Adam and Eve freedom, except to eat of the knowledge of Tree of Good and Evil. In the New Testament there are over 50 references to freedom.

### **Created Yearning for Freedom**

Everyone is created by God yearning for freedom and control over their own lives. Research has been done in this area with elderly people in a nursing home with houseplants. Patients who were given the responsibility and freedom to care for houseplants, versus those who were absolved from the care, with the staff taking care of their plants, proved that, over the next 6 months more than 30% of those who had the plants cared for by the staff died. In another study, when offered the choice of having control over the date, and time of visits from a student, or no visit at all, yielded similar results over those who had no control over a student visitor. After two months, those who had the freedom were happier, healthier, and more active with fewer medications. (Stumbling onto Happiness/ Daniel Gilbert /p.22-23) The Creator gave us certain inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the \_\_\_\_\_.

The word freedom can be like the word love in terms of misunderstanding. Love is just as much an act as it is a feeling. Freedom can be abused when it is limited to being the ability to do what you want to do, when you want to do it, without boundaries. Remember, "If it feels good, do it"? I don't think this is what Jefferson, Adam, Moses, or Jesus meant. Reinhold Niebuhr said, "Basically, love means being responsible to our families, (community), civilization, and to

the universe of humankind. Being free is more than just about me doing my own thing. It is about the freedom to love, compassion, mercy, and justice.

### **Freedom and Love are Connected**

Frederick Buechner said, "If you have not cried for someone other than yourself in the last year, then the chances are you are already dead." Freedom and Love both begin with empathy for others. This is difficult for us. Our old reptilian brain/old adam and eve is always asking "what's in it for me?" This is a struggle. The Apostle Paul identifies this struggle in Chapter 7 of Romans when he says, "I can decide what I want to do, but I am powerless to do it." I can identify with Paul and his struggle. Not only does the struggle for freedom and love exist outside of ourselves, but also within us. We struggle with a sense of powerlessness at times to love, acknowledge the freedom of others to be compassionate by allowing others to have "life, liberty, and \_\_\_\_\_."

### **Yoked to Jesus**

Jesus in the Gospel this morning gives us a way to handle this struggle of freedom and love when we are as Paul says "powerless". Jesus says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Come to me he says, come all of you, come. Oxen, at the time of Jesus, were linked together with a wooden yoke across their neck that assisted in pulling a greater load than either could carry alone. You are yoked to Christ in your baptism. You are able to carry on and go beyond because you are powerful. Only when you see freedom as doing it your way do you become powerless, like Paul in his addresses in Romans. Being yoked to Jesus frees you from fear. You are not alone. You are yoked with Christ in your struggle to live as a free person, inside and outside. You are daily invited to come to him, all of you who are overburdened with life. Come...

Jesus says, come and I will give you rest from the burdens you cannot bear. We can do this says the Lord. In the Lord's Supper you will share in a few moments is no cookout like you will have this afternoon or tomorrow, but it is an invitation celebrating your freedom, because you are yoked to Christ, in and with love. Come and celebrate the freedom and the love of God for you in this Christ who emptied himself in the struggle for freedom.