

Freedom

On July 4, 1776—almost 250 years ago—representatives of the 13 American colonies signed the Declaration of Independence. The heart of the Declaration of Independence is found in these words: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.”

God’s gift of liberty... freedom... this is at the heart of our celebrations this weekend. However, God’s gift of freedom has its roots many, many years earlier—approximately 3500 years ago, to be exact. The place was Egypt, and God’s people, the Hebrew people, the descendants of Abraham and Sarah—God’s people were living in crushing slavery.

God planned to set them free. So, he chose Moses to lead them out of the land of slavery to the land of promise. The Bible reading this morning describes how God called Moses, speaking to Moses from a burning bush on the holy mountain called Mt. Horeb or Mt. Sinai [2 names for the same mountain]. And what did God say? In verse 7 we read: “I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings...”

Now here’s the amazing thing: God says the same thing to us today—to each one of us: “I have seen the affliction of my people who are in North Rose, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings...”

Obviously, our suffering is much different than that of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. Yet, we too struggle with the crushing lack of freedom, with things which hold us in slavery. What are

those things in our lives which keep us in chains? There are many we could mention: sin; self-centeredness; worry; guilt; anger; the hurtful things others have said to us through the years; the negative things we say to ourselves... We may struggle with addictions; abusive relationships; financial problems; serious health issues; hopeless work situations.

In the midst of all the oppresses us, God speaks his promise of freedom loudly & clearly: “I have seen the affliction of my people, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings...” God wants us to be free. And this isn’t just a general inclination toward freedom on God’s part. It is personal and specific for each one of us. What were God’s first words in this passage? (In fact, God’s first words in the Book of Exodus.) “Moses, Moses.” (Ex. 3:4) Not just once, but twice, God called Moses’ name. And God is calling us—each one of us—by name. Not just once, but twice, to make sure he gets our attention. God wants us to be free.

I remember a saying from when I was growing up—maybe you heard it too: “Where there’s a will, there’s a way.” “Where there’s a will, there’s a way.” God has the will to set us free. God also has the way to set us free. For the Hebrew slaves, that way was by sending Moses to guide them out of Egypt.

For us, the way to freedom is even more profound: it is by sending his own Son, Jesus Christ. In Galatians 5:1 we read God’s promise: “For freedom, Christ has set us free.” In Jesus, our sins are forgiven; sins & failures no longer have the power to separate us from God and ruin our lives. In Jesus, we are restored to our rightful place as the sons & daughters of God, we experience God’s love and peace surrounding us. In Jesus we have an example to

follow, a model of how to live life fully for God. Jesus is with us—constantly reminding us that we are valued by God, giving us strength for the struggles we face, guiding us in God’s paths, freeing us to live with meaning & purpose. “For freedom, Christ has set us free.”

So how do we get this freedom to live fully? By believing in Jesus, by putting our faith in him as our Savior, by pledging allegiance to him, by trusting him daily to be our Lord and Guide in life. Usually this sense of freedom doesn’t happen all at once, but slowly, gradually we experience that God’s power is setting us free from all that holds us in chains.

Now, when we think of a meal to celebrate freedom, we usually think of 4th of July picnics. But this meal—Holy Communion—is an even greater celebration of freedom. In the broken bread and outpoured cup, we remember Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins... his broken body, his outpoured blood. Here, at the Lord’s Supper, we receive forgiveness for our sins, we are reminded that we have a place at the family table in God’s house, and we are strengthened to live for God.

So let us come to the Lord’s table, trusting in Jesus, and receiving God’s gift of freedom for today... and for eternity. Amen.