

“If Not For Freedom, Then.....?”
Pentecost 7, Luke 10:1-11
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I. INDEPENDENCE DAY!

My country tis of thee
Sweet land of Liberty
Of thee I sing

Land where my fathers died
land of the pilgrim’s pride
From every mountain side
Let freedom ring.

Ah, freedom. Independence. Liberty. Escape from tyranny—governmental and religious. Individual rights. The pursuit of life, liberty and happiness. “One nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all!”

This is our *banner* weekend. Not just a good excuse for a holiday—to roll out a parade and all our craft booths and pies and funnel cakes, BBQ’s and fireworks. (*Especially* pies!) But that time, once a year, when we truly celebrate what it is to be country together. What our deepest, most core values *are* as a nation.

II. FREEDOM IN THE BIBLE AND CULTURE

Freedom. Independence. “We fight for our freedom,” goes the chant. It’s in the DNA of our American culture, is it not?

We also hear it in our scriptures, from *way* back, and from our contemporary prophets, in our slogans and songs!

It’s on our bumper stickers and our state mottos:
“Live Free Or Die!”

“Free to be Me!”

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (2 Cor 3:17)

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1)

But, there’s a **twist**. A *catch* to this freedom. Even long before the American colonies won their independence from colonial England and King George.

Listen closely for this “other side of the coin.”

Galatians 5:13:

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; *only* (but) do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said:
“No one is free until we are ALL free”

Emma Lazarus: “Until we are *all* free, we are *none* of us free.”

Nelson Mandela: Freedom is indivisible, and when one man is enslaved, all are *not* free. For to be free is *not* to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.

III. WE’RE NOT FREE!

And thus, we celebrate freedom, but also look at what it really means to be free—or not. Is our freedom INdependence or does it depend on *others*, and others being free as well?

Juxtaposed with our hoopla and rah-rah about freedom, we have a slew of crazy events this past week leading up to our Independence Day to reflect on, and this odd little “Marching Orders Manual” from Jesus to the disciples in our scripture today.

What was that again? Something about “going out two-by-two” and preaching the Good News, bringing peace and healing, but if they don’t accept it – or accept you and your message—then **shake the dust off** your feet and move on?! “Catch you later!” That’s what they (and we) are to say to those who aren’t willing to accept the peace we’re trying to bring?

Hmmm.....

QUESTION: Maybe to understand how to bring this all into focus, we need to *ask* the question. The Elephant in the Room. ARE we free? How **free** do you feel this morning? How free did you feel yesterday? Last week? In the sense of freedom that our forefathers and foremothers declared? Hmmm....

Well, as we look around, I’d say we’re *not* free from **hatred** being spewed on national media. From **discrimination** being masked as religious freedom. For starters.

- When voting rights for everyone get harder and harder to come by instead of easier
- When legal immigration status gets stricter and harder to pursue by those who truly seek it.
- When simply finding a place to live that you can afford on your minimum wage job and raise your family becomes near impossible
- When finding a place to rest your weary head on a sidewalk or park bench if you are homeless becomes illegal;
- When calling 911 too many times because you’re the victim of domestic violence leads to “three strikes you’re out” and you get *evicted*, then we are NOT free!

--When American children are right up there in the list of countries where kids live below the poverty line and go to bed hungry at night—I submit that we are not free.

When our own Declaration of Independence, famous for its prophetic line: “All men are created equal,” just 30 lines below,

refers to Native Americans as “merciless Indian savages.” I wonder—are we truly free?

CARA: The question of freedom hit our own community in a hard way **this** week. We learned of one of our own who was definitely **not** free. Not at liberty to shake off the dust of an abusive home and live her own destiny –which *was* her inalienable right in this country.

From what I can piece together—from family and friends and news reports—Cara Russell lived for 15 years in a physically and emotionally abusive relationship—increasingly isolated from family and afraid to seek freedom—for fear of repercussions for herself and her stepson.

We are *not* free, indeed, if we cannot be protected from our own family members’ intent to harm. Sadly, this is the case for far too many. Domestic violence is a concern that must *constantly* be held up and brought to the light of day in *ever-better* ways. Never swept under the rug. Never excused with platitudes that “someone can just leave if they want to. Can just “shake the dust off and walk away.” It’s just.not.that.simple.

We must ask ourselves the question on this day: What places do we need to “shake the dust off” in order to truly be free? Where can we and *must* we “get involved” in fighting for freedom, liberty and justice for ALL?

IV. FREEDOM TO BE RELIGIOUS

Another area big in the news of late: Religious Freedom. What our forebears came to America in the first place for.

We claim to have that as a core value of our country, BUT, if religious freedom is really only about *one* religion’s right to express itself freely and not *every* religion—that’s not freedom but a farce.

Just this week, major debates took place between religious and political leaders. “Freedom of Religion” it seems, to far too many, is really *only* freedom to exercise *my* religion not others’!

Melina Delkic in **Does Religious Freedom Still Exist for Muslims?** expresses how this feels to an American who is not of the Christian majority:

She begins by telling of what it’s like being called a “terrorist” at age 12! That because people erroneously equate the acts of a few evil ones with an entire religion, she does not live free in this country.

“I love America, she says. I love our history, our constitution, our government. I love our authors, our newspapers, our movies. I love our helpful, friendly people, and the way that strangers smile at you at grocery stores. That doesn’t happen everywhere.

But this isn’t Religious Freedom.

I couldn’t possibly recount all of the hurtful moments; the invasive, sometimes hurtful questions; the acceptance of the politicians who hate us.

I’ve come to be afraid of loving my own religion - my beautiful, peaceful, loving religion.

I’ve endured a lifetime of unabashed, heartbreaking attacks on my religion and, ultimately, on myself.

Religious Freedom *should* mean that [we all] get to love [our religion] publicly and without fear of repercussions.

I won’t go into why hatred doesn’t move America forward, because our ancestors and our Founding Fathers already knew this. I won’t go into why it’s *wrong* to punish an entire group for the actions of a few, because that would fill a novel. I won’t go into why it’s wrong to make people afraid to be who they are.

But I *will* ask you to consider something next time you meet a Muslim or talk about Islam in any context: a Muslim is *not* described solely by the word Muslim. A Muslim is a person, with parents and feelings and hopes and dreams.

V. THERE’S GOOD NEWS!

Bob Marley said of freedom: “Free speech carries with it some freedom to listen.”

And the good news this week in the world today, and good news that needs to be heard (!), is that people are *learning* to listen. In far-reaching ways—not just with people they know, but reaching out to strangers—fellow human beings on the planet that they just haven’t met yet.

The Urban Confessional Project

Twice a week, small groups of people head out to the streets of Los Angeles, hold up “Free Listening” signs, and then listen to anyone who wants to talk.

The Urban Confessional project, which now happens in more than a dozen other cities around the world, is based on a simple premise: People need to be heard, but it’s something that doesn’t

often happen in a meaningful way in everyday life.

"It's easy to do," says Urban Confessional founder Benjamin Mathes. "In a way we're challenging some institutions—you don't have to be a priest, you don't have to be a counselor to be with somebody. You don't have to be anything but who you are. In doing that, I think we've taken away a lot of the barriers to human connection."

"People almost always respond the same way," Mathes says. "They'll say, *why* are you doing this? They're totally surprised that somebody would offer to be there for them. My response is always the same: I just say, I'm doing it for you. They're like, what's the catch? I say, there's no catch." (remind you of the RRFCG?) As they listen, volunteers simply pay close attention to whatever the stranger in front of them is saying and offer some empathetic responses. They don't give advice. They don't record the conversations.

"It's really changed the way I see the world," Mathes says. People are walking around with a whole lot of crap on their shoulders, and they don't always express that. We don't always know what journey everybody's going through."

Since the project started in L.A. four years ago, it has spread to Barcelona; Lima, Peru; Sydney; Tokyo; New York; and multiple other cities.

"I really do believe we're in the noisiest time in human history, and we're desperate for someone to get out there and encourage *connection* in a deep way," Mathes says.

VI. SHAKE THE DUST OFF AND MOVE ON

10 1-2 Later the Master selected seventy and sent them ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he intended to go.

3 "On your way! But be careful—this is hazardous work.

4 "Travel light. Comb and toothbrush and no extra luggage.

5-6 "When you enter a home, greet the family, 'Peace.' If your greeting is received, then it's a good place to stay. But if it's not received, take it back and get out. Don't impose yourself.

8-9 "When you enter a town and are received, eat what they set before you, heal anyone who is sick, and tell them, 'God's kingdom is right on your doorstep!'

10-12 "When you enter a town and are not received, go out in the street and say, 'The only thing we got from you is the dirt on our feet, and we're giving it back. Did you have any idea that God's kingdom was right on your doorstep?'

Maybe "shaking the dust off" is getting rid of our preconceived notions. Of our very definitions of freedom. It's shaking off our indifference and apathy, as we realize—none too soon—that the ways we've been bestowing or accepting one another's peace is NOT working very well. Shaking off the myth that an eye for an eye, tit-for-tat approach actually works!

When you go into a town—your own or another's. When you go into a country, a neighborhood; a group, club or organization.....pronounce Peace. Look for ways to help, to pitch-in, to speak up for the marginalized, to listen. To the needs, the hurts, the painful histories. Listen to those who have been voiceless before. And ask what can be done to bring peace, to work together for the Kingdom of God—that beloved community where harmony is the order of the day instead of vitriol and violence.

Epperly says it like this: What first step can you *personally* take to claim God's abundant life? What community action can make *your* town more just in its care for marginalized communities and reduce the gap between wealth and poverty? There are complex issues, and unintended consequences, but some things are obvious, simple, and effective on the path to Shalom and abundance (for all.)

Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us of this over 50 years ago, but still so right on:

“When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black and white, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old spiritual, ‘Free at last! free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!’”

Happy Interdependence Day—

John Pavlovitz, a modern-day Christian prophet—not afraid to “tell it like it is:” wrote this week, as we celebrate this holiday, calling us back to our true “core values”—a piece called “Interdependence Day”:

Whether one believes in a Divine Creator who designed it and spoke it all into being or in a chance process that happened over time, this planet is Humanity's home.

It is our single shared space where we seek meaning and breathe and run and curse and pray and love and kill and dance and die—and we do none of it truly independently, never completely disconnected from it all.

If we don't live intentionally mindful of this, we will not be doing justice to the precious, fleeting days we are given, and we will be perpetually living at less than we are capable of living. We are all one tribe. Every person is the neighbor we are called to love as ourselves.

A child across town or half a world away is as precious as the one sleeping in our nursery. Wherever and whenever you may be reading this, may this truth find its way into the deepest recesses of your heart.

Happy INTERdependence Day!

On this Independence Day weekend, let us make our own Declaration of Independence *and* Interdependence. To declare freedom *from* that which keeps us enslaved. Enslaved to the myth that we can make it alone, individualized, self-focused and not needing one another. Let's free ourselves from the illusion of *false* freedom. From believing that dividing and conquering and regulating away anything that scares or annoys us will assure our freedom.

And declare, instead that *interdependence* is all we really have and what we really *need*. “And crown thy good with brotherhood. From sea to shining sea!” And sisterhood!

And let us gather, around the Table—open and welcoming to ALL. No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here. To circle-up, take a place at the Banquet of Love and Life, to break the bread and share the cup. Free at last. Free at last. Great God almighty, we *are* free at last!

Amen.