

## Pastor Colleen's Sermon of July 5, 2009

**Grace, Peace and Mercy be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen**

Welcome to "the day after."  
The day after the picnic,  
The day after the family reunion  
The day after the parade  
The day after the grilling and swim party  
The day after the huge fireworks display...

July 5<sup>th</sup> for many is a day when we find ourselves tired from staying up late at a party or firework celebration  
It is a day we feel bleary eyed and sun burned  
It is not a day where we usually think about getting up early and gathering in church.  
So to say I am happy to see you all here today is an understatement.  
I am THRILLED that it is not just P. Sharon, Bruce and the choir.

I am glad that God has brought you to this place today,  
I am glad because I can think of no place better to continue the celebration of our Independence and Freedom.

Because that is really why we are here every Sunday  
We are here to celebrate our Freedom  
We are here to Praise and Worship the very One who gave us this extraordinary gift in the first place.

Yesterday was the day to celebrate our civil freedom.  
To lift up and honor the beginnings of our country  
To celebrate the freedom and independence that was hard fought

Yesterday was the day to gather around the flag  
But today on this Sunday, we gather instead around the Word  
We gather around the cross  
And we celebrate a different freedom  
Our freedom in Christ.

So I am wondering...  
What does it mean to all of us to be free as Christians?

And I think we need to think beyond being able to worship the God of our choice  
Or religious freedom  
Or the freedom to worship at all  
I mean...

What does it mean to really be free BECAUSE of Christ?

Have you thought about this?

Have you taken the time in the midst of this holiday to really breathe in what being free in Christ means for your life?

I have been wondering a lot about this so I posed this question to some of my colleagues on facebook.

And many of my fellow preachers chimed in with their thoughts...

One friend said,

*Jesus frees me to say "no" to the ways of status, control, and selfishness the world promotes, and to say "yes" to loving others and making mistakes, trusting in God's power to forgive and renew...*

Another said, *"Freedom is not simply being free to do whatever I want, because whatever I want may not be the best thing for me or fair to someone else. Christian freedom is freedom from sin. I am set free by being forgiven and called to respond by living in a way that regards my neighbor, proclaims the good news, and builds the kingdom "on earth as in heaven".*

And my favorite response was the simplest...

*"Freedom in Christ means I am freed from earning my place, salvation with God."*

I liked these answers because they reminded me that this is the kind of Freedom we should celebrate daily...

This is the kind of freedom we should tell people about...

Which brings us to this morning's gospel...

Jesus calls the twelve and he sends them out two by two...

And he sends them out with the bare essentials...

the clothes on their backs and the sandals on their feet.

They are to depend on the kindness of strangers

And if they come to a place that does not want to hear what they have to say,

They are to shake the dust from their sandals and simply move on to the next place...

**THIS IS FREEDOM AT ITS BEST!!!**

When Jesus counseled his first disciples to "shake off the dust from their feet,"

they were to shake off their souls from those people and places that produced only negative energy or negative power.

There is great freedom in these directions because it gave the disciples permission to fail

It gave them the freedom to wade into new, uncharted territory and to take a risk for the gospel.

It offered them the freedom to stay with those who were excited by this good news...

But it also offered them the freedom to leave those who rejected them.

It gave them the freedom NOT to

sit in their negativity

or to let their failure stop them or keep them there...

but instead to shake off the dust and move on...

That is freedom at work.

And that is part of the freedom we have in our own lives

Yet, how many times do we let our fear of HOW our good news will be received stop us from sharing it?

For example:

If I tell my co-worker that I can't play softball on Sunday because I go to church with my family will I be rejected or made fun of?

If I choose to go to Bible Study class after work on Tuesday instead of going to happy hour will my friends laugh?

If I help my church's youth group raise \$5,000 for the homeless will my friends at school make fun of me for wanting to spend time at church instead of the high school football game?

When we forget our freedom in Christ then there are lots of reasons to not go out and share the good news.

But when we remember we are free, **because of** Christ...

We can share our good news regardless of how it is received.

Because if our friends laugh, or judge us, or reject us...

We can shake the dust off our feet and move on and really celebrate with those who welcome us and want to share in the power of God.

Jesus, the very Son of God, said:

"Love God with all your heart mind and soul and your neighbor as yourself. Do these and you shall live."

In other words:

Be bound to God in love;

be bound to your neighbor in service.

Be bound tightly and passionately to both and you shall be free.

And I realize it seems paradoxical to hear freedom equated with being bound to anything

However, when we are bound to God through the love of our Lord Jesus Christ

Then we are bound to one another through that same love

And then dear friends we are truly free.

Free to be the people God intends us to be.

Free to be kind, loving, generous, productive, creative people;

that are so filled with the love of God that we can do nothing less than serve our needy neighbors.

THAT is God's intention for us.

We are not to be enslaved to our appetites and sins and addictions;

we are not to be trapped by our selfish desires.

We human beings are free when we are bound to God in love and bound to one another in service.

This holiday weekend is a good time to celebrate the paradox at the center of the Christian faith:  
That we are most free when we are most bonded.  
Through Jesus Christ's supreme example of freedom in service,  
we all become the most free when we bind ourselves to Christ.  
The one who freely stripped himself of his divinity so that he could make the ultimate sacrifice  
for our sake and for our freedom

May we this day remember that true freedom comes through faith in Christ  
who has canceled the power of sin and death for us  
and opened us to a future which knows no end.

That is a freedom worth celebrating today and everyday  
That is a freedom worth sharing  
That is a freedom worth taking a risk for and a freedom worth being bound to.  
Amen

**May the peace of God which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and your  
minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen**