

Sermon for July 3rd, 2022

Grace and peace to you from God the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit amen.

My fellow Americans tomorrow is July 4th Independence in America!

When Kimberly and I studied for our US citizenship test one of the questions was ***“name one of the freedoms of the 1st Amendments?”*** Of course I chose Freedom of Religion over the other choices but what was shocking to me was that the 1st amendment reads: ***“That everyone in the United States has the right to practice his or her own religion, or no religion at all.”*** No religion?

Recently I read an article that reported that the United States has experienced another drop in the number of people professing faith in God and more are turning away from God. The article could even track which political affiliation that they belonged to.

Having studied our US citizenship questions, I did notice that on July 4th 1776 America declared her independence from Great Britain for many and various freedoms but the question this morning is....can anyone in America or anywhere else in the world be truly free without Jesus in their life?

Historically, Lutherans evangelized-that is we went out into the world to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ-and a little known fact is that here in America the very first book written in an American Indian language was Luther’s Small Catechism in Delaware!

Lutherans have also evangelized from Madagascar to Peru but over time, as we entered more and more into societies around the world, we simply birthed our way into the church and stopped going out into the world to proclaim the Good News! Families were supplying enough children and all was well...or so we thought. Well we can see around us that is no longer the case!

The sad reality is that many of us could start proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ and free people from the law, sin, death and the devil without having to learn a second language or travel around the world: we can do so in our families, friendships, or through people we meet at restaurants like Elaine!

Especially now, when people are looking everywhere for signs of light in the darkness of the current state of the world with inflation, prices of food and fuel, the stress of

working longer hours and doing other's jobs who just gave up over the last two years because of Covid-19, war in the Ukraine and now monkey pox.

All these stresses end up binding us to sleepless nights and anxious days like incarcerated prisoners! But there is freedom in God and it doesn't cost a penny!

In the first reading from Isaiah we heard that the prophet proclaimed the Word of God as an allegory in which God's people are like infants that are fed and cared for like a mother cares for her children. ***"You shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees"*** God, like a mother protects her children and comforts them in that Greek way of family love called ***"storge."***

The Psalmist David wrote this morning that he wanted to remind us all to tell the world of how much God has done for His creation! ***"Come now and see the works of God, how wonderful He is in His doing toward all people!"*** We can hear the blessing for those who are humble in heart and follow the ways of the Lord and yet there is also a warning for the world for the consequences of falling away from God and believing in false gods! But the psalmist ends his psalm of Thanksgiving verses with what God has done for us that we may know God's Word and God's love!

In St. Paul's letter to the church in Galatia he wrote to the church of how we are to have that type of Greek love called ***"Philio"*** which is that brotherly type of love for one another. We are called to watch out for each other and for our families and friends and gently remind them that some of the actions and decisions we make and they make might not be the best for ourselves or for them.

Use the spirit of gentleness as we are called to plant and sow the seeds from the Holy Spirit. And although it's exhausting work to continue to love in this manner when we do not see any results; we are still called to proclaim God's love in our weariness.

Remember that the law will not save but those who walk in the ways of the Lord which are peace and mercy will be saved! We are called to spread the Good News of Jesus in the way that farmers plant seeds, we are called to plant seeds of faith in Christ Jesus in the hearts of those we encounter. The reality is that agricultural crops grow a lot faster than faith does but that doesn't mean we don't try and try again.

In the Gospel text for this morning we heard that Jesus had expanded His ministry from having chosen 12 to now appointing 72 others to go out two by two and proclaim the

Kingdom of God! The number 72 may represent the time of the three holy days from Good Friday to Easter Sunday of Christ Himself!

First Lutheran would fall short in being able to call that many people to go out and do the mission work of Christ because we have about 58 on average in the month of June. The reality is that many take, June, July and August off as vacation time. Honestly, our numbers are still good here in Washington. In my hometown people head out to the lake for a month or two and the churches are pretty empty until after the Labour Day long weekend is over! But we must remember where two or three are gathered in His name. God is with us! That is the promise of Jesus!

Christ calls us in the Gospel this morning to bring the freedom that can only be found in Jesus and His peace! The True peace that this world cannot offer but Jesus can where He heals the sin sick soul.

The challenge is for us is that Jesus has called you and I just as He called the 72 to call our friends, families, strangers and the world to repent, now we return to ancient Greek once again for in the meaning of the word repent "*metanoia*" denotes a change of mind and heart, a reorientation, a complete turnaround from where we once were in our hearts and minds to a new way of loving God and others.

That brings us to the Greek type of love that Jesus has for you and I for the world known as "*agape*" love which is that sacrificing love that Jesus has for us and for the world.

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus, the freedoms that we experience here in these United States of America are freedoms which no other country has. (I can tell you that as someone born in another country!) That is why people are willing to risk their lives to journey to this country.

The 1st Amendments of the United States Constitution the freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and finally the freedom to petition the government! These are freedoms that many other countries citizens can only dream of.

So tomorrow night as the rocket's red glare burst in the night skies, the stars and stripes are flying high in the sky, and we enjoy the freedoms of this nation let us never forget the true freedom that is only found in our Lord and Saviour Jesus the Christ. **Amen**