

Exodus 19:1-9
1 Peter 2:9-17
Galatians 5:13-14

July 11, 2021
Freedom Together

Last Sunday, Independence Day, I spoke of the earth-shattering truth embodied in the Declaration of Independence: "...that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The is the earth-shattering truth stated that each person's value is not derived from governments or even from the mercies of democracy. **We are created in the image of God, born with dignity and freedom.** Government's purpose is to protect that freedom and dignity from infringement by criminals and governments. The inspiration for these founding principles is in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

I contrasted these ideals of 1776 with the ideas of the French Revolution in 1789. I hope you will go back to that message and read again the contrast between these two mutually exclusive views of freedom and life.

LIBERATION FIRST

Exodus: the Old Testament story of **Moses leading the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, is** also understood as **a metaphor of liberation from slavery to sin.** [The Bible is the story of God's gift of life and freedom to humans. God's greatest gift to us - Christ Jesus - frees us from the shackles of sin, *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that ...we should no longer be slaves to sin...* Romans 6:6.] Exodus was the birth of the Jewish nation and has been the inspiration for personal and political freedom down to the present day. [It inspired the Swiss, Dutch, Scottish, and English reformations of church, state, and society. Oliver Cromwell, leader of the English revolution declared the Exodus as their model.] It was a key theme for the Puritans who settled New England.¹ Both Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson proposed to use it for the Great Seal of the United States. African American spirituals, like "Go Down Moses" carry the theme of Exodus, while many speeches and sermons of the civil rights movement echoed the words from **Leviticus 25:10 Proclaim liberty throughout the land to all the inhabitants...**

Freedom has been a cry of many peoples and movements throughout history. It begs the question, though, "Freedom for what?" **History reveals the specter of despotism looming over every great social change in the name of liberty.** The Roman Republic was short-lived. During the civil wars that wracked Rome, every leader and every party claimed in their turn to be defending the cause of liberty and peace. But as Roman historian Lucan said: "When peace came, it was the peace of despotism"² Rome's brief republic ended in the Ceasars, France's revolution ended in Napoleon, Russia's in Stalin, and China's in Mao and the iron grip of the CCP continues today.³ For 245 years the American Revolution has withstood the pressure of despots and dictators. Yet today we ask, "Can our freedom endure?"

ENDURING FREEDOM

Liberation is one thing. Maintaining and nurturing freedom is something else altogether. Liberation may take no longer than a moment, but **freedom is a way of life**

that takes longer and requires patience and persistence... failure to understand this principle leads to violence.⁴

After God freed the children of Israel from the clutch of Pharaoh He led them to the Promised Land by an indirect route. **When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter.** For God said, *“If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.”* So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle, **Exodus 17-18.**

It didn't take long to get the Israelites out of Egypt. **It took much longer to get Egypt out of the Israelites.** God knows human nature yet respects our freedom, and so refuses to accelerate change through force and violence.

The communist revolutions have believed that the “new man” could be made through coercion and brutality. The result has been terror, resentment, and hatred. Those methods are mimicked in cancel culture, political correctness, CRT, squashing of debate with charges of racism, homophobia, and every other phobia hurled by the leftist radicals. **We know that only through the power of God,** in Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, **can human nature change for the better.** Morally formed by God's word, with patience and persistence, people will continue in freedom. So how can liberty, once achieved, be maintained, and passed on to the next generation?

COVENANT

In a word: COVENANT. Author Os Guinness writes: **“A covenant is therefore promise keeping and trust writ large and made lasting.** It is the trust that underlies all healthy families and all good relationships now expanded to become the foundation of an entire society and even a nation. A covenant is a commitment that makes life worth living and enables life to be lived well. It is a word of honor given at a point in time that binds together past, present, and future, making possible lasting love, enduring freedom, flourishing lives, and a healthy community.”⁵

Again, we find our guide in the Bible. Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, *“This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel... “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”* So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, **“We will do everything the LORD has said...”** **Exodus 19: 3, 5-8.**

The new nation of Israel was born out of a covenant with God: **“We will do everything the LORD has said.”** It is no coincidence that **the preamble to the U.S. Constitution begins with these words: “We the people...”** The Declaration of Independence has this immortal line: *“... governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”*

People do not exist to serve the state. **The state exists to serve the people, and the people exist to serve God.** In this covenant people agree to live together as those respecting God, respecting one another as free individuals made in God's image, and respecting the laws for the common good. Without the agreement of the majority of people the covenant will not hold, and liberty will slip away.

As we confront all the social ills in our nation today we can do no better than to heed the sacred words of the O.T. prophets to keep the covenant once made with God and one another.

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God, Micah 6:8

Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger, Zeph. 2:3.

Without trust our covenant falls apart. As our culture has moved away from trust in God, I have seen a breakdown of trust in other areas. Marriage is the most obvious, with the high divorce rate. It has now become commonplace for people to mistrust campaign promises of politicians, and events of the past several years have revealed just how untrustworthy are many of the institutions we once relied upon. [I've been shocked at how politics has corrupted the U.S. Justice Department, the FBI, the IRS, to name a few.] This includes churches. Not only the sex scandals of the R.C. church but our own denomination where clergy and bishops refuse to obey the rules agreed upon by the denomination. There is no way to maintain trust necessary for covenant-keeping under such circumstances.

Where does trust begin? Right here in each person's heart. We must be people of our word, from the smallest promise to largest. We must earnestly fulfill our responsibilities, be they vows of office, vows of church membership, vows of marriage, not to mention honesty in all transactions, even obeying traffic laws. These are the building blocks of a high trust organization and society.

The Hebrews at Sinai placed their trust in God and God trusted them to obey the laws. It is no coincidence that the motto found on our nation's currency is "in God we trust." A society built on trust can maintain freedom for individuals and live together as one in harmony, peace, and justice. Christianity instructs us: ***Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God, 1 Peter 2:16.***

Addressing Wrongs the Right Way

The postmodern ethos says, "Follow your heart." The Bible says, ***The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9.*** Name all the flaws in that "critical theory" decries, and you have identified the sin that resides in every human heart.

Some may remember the terrible tragedy that shook Charleston, S.C. in 2015. "Mother Emmanuel" AME Church (the oldest Black Church in the South. Founded in 1816) has long been a center of faith and hope in a racially troubled city. In the summer of 2015 Dylann Roof, a 21-year-old White supremacist, who had been attending a Wednesday Bible study at the church, suddenly pulled a gun out of his backpack

and opened fire – killing the pastor and three others. He had intended to start a race war. Would riots engulf this city as in other cities when a Black person was killed by a White person?

Forty-eight hours after the murders, family members of the victims were offered an opportunity to speak at Roof's bond hearing. The first to speak was a daughter who had lost her mother. "I forgive you," she said, fighting back tears. "You took something really precious from me. I will never talk to her again. I will never hold her again, but I forgive you and have mercy on your soul."

One by one other family members spoke of their great loss and then offered forgiveness to murderer. One son who had lost his mother said, "... **forgiving is so much tougher than holding a grudge.** It takes a lot more courage to forgive than it does to say, 'I'm going to be upset about whatever forever.'"

Forgiveness brought the city together and averted violence. The killer was still convicted, yes there was still racism, and some scorned the Christians as being soft. But retaliation and revenge were stopped in their tracks.⁶

Our national covenant cradles the values and virtues that derive from Sinai and Calvary. They are diametrically opposed to the values of Marxist, leftist, postmodern, progressivism, Antifa, Planned Parenthood, and BLM, that are assaulting our culture and civil society. The Marxist view sees all things as a power struggle. Power is their idol and it's accumulation their aim. They believe "might makes right."

The Bible teaches that "right makes might." *'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts, Zech. 4:6.* God is righteous and ours is to respond to His call to be righteous. *Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn, Isaiah 51:1.*

There is no mercy in the "cancel culture." Social media posts, recordings, and quotes from years past may be dredged up and hung around your neck. It's like the devil whispering in your ear, "See, you're guilty. You're no good. You'll never be good." The accused and must grovel at the feet of this new morality.

The Bible teaches us to practice mercy and forgiveness. *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, Matt. 6:14.* Where biblical values prevail balm can be poured onto wounds, while leftist progressivism searches for grievances and pours on vinegar.

The Bible leads us to see the equality and dignity of all and demand justice be applied equally to all, from president to pauper. Leftist progressivism exploits inequality to arouse resentment and redresses injustice with revenge, retribution, redistribution, and reparation.

The followers of Christ stand for love that drives out hate and light that drives out darkness. Leftist progressivism perpetuates hate and darkness to use as its instruments of power.⁷

A nation of free people cannot be built on a foundation of hate, resentment, and rage. **To be truly free you must let go of hate.**

Pass It On

Renewal of our church covenant, just like renewal of our national covenant, is the only thing that will stem decline. **Schooling in the beliefs of our Christian faith should go in tandem with schooling in the art of freedom.** This is not a luxury but a necessity. **... be careful and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when he said to me, "Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children, Deut. 4:9-10.**

Our story is the story we tell ourselves. The narrative being spread by the so-called 1619 Project is simply false and we must be prepared to say so. The claim that this nation is inherently racist is as false as Karl Marx's claim that religion is the "opiate of the masses." I've observed over many years that whenever the progressive left accuses others of some terrible wrong, that is the very wrong they are guilty of. So, Marxism becomes the opiate and new religion of many while CRT teaches children (to judge people by the color of their skin) to be racists. These are not biblical values, nor have they been the values of America.

President Ronald Reagan's wise words still ring true today: "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men were free."

If we want the blessings of liberty for our children, and beyond, we better get serious about our faith in Christ. That we have not always been faithful to Christ does not diminish Him. Though we have fallen short of the ideals of the Declaration of Independence that does not invalidate it. It only means we must rededicate our efforts. **Freedom is not permission to do whatever you want, but the power to do what you ought.**

This is our time to restore the true story of America. This is our day to even revive our faith in Christ. Christian people, and all Americans, who believe in the uniqueness and beauty of ordered freedom must stand athwart the destructive path of the progressive left. We must be able to say, "You may talk of liberty, justice and peace, but we are not fooled. Your radical justice is only resentment, division, and hatred in your greed for power. But not through us. We live by a completely different vision of justice and freedom, and we will not be moved."

The task before us seems daunting. But remember the words of our Savior: **What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden; and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches," Luke 13:19.**

And again He said: **"To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough," Luke 13:20-21.**

Let all who profess faith in Christ do so with unwavering commitment. Let us be the leaven in the loaf of this nation. Let us practice the virtues and morality that will raise each person to that place where a free and sovereign people can govern themselves.

Though our efforts may seem insignificant, yet like the mustard seed, tiny as it is, it grows into a tree that provides shade and shelter, where liberty can build its nest.

¹ Exodus is behind Governor Bradford's Mayflower Compact and John Winthrop's "Modell of Christian Charity."

² Lucan, *Pharsalia I*, 670, in Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1939), 9; as quoted in Os Guinness, *The Magna Carta of Humanity*, (InterVarsity Press, 2021), 217.

³ *Ibid*, 217.

⁴ Os Guinness, *The Magna Carta of Humanity*, (InterVarsity Press, 2021), 141.

⁵ *Ibid*, 154.

⁶ *Ibid*, 218-219.

⁷ *Ibid*, 214-215.