

Lectionary 14 Year A 2020
July 5, 2020

***Gospel Reading changed to Luke 10:25-37 for Fourth of July weekend.**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I took the liberty of changing our gospel reading today for the Fourth of July holiday. Somehow, with the events of our nation and world over these last few weeks, the parable of the Good Samaritan seemed like a better fit for this Sunday's worship. I think this is in part because one of the hot topics these last several weeks is that of freedom, and as we celebrate the Fourth of July, we focus on the many freedoms that we have in our country. But many have argued lately that our elected leaders have infringed on these freedoms when issuing orders requiring masks to be worn in public places, ordering businesses to close and people to stay home for their safety and the safety of others.

Masks have especially become a point of contention in our society and even in churches. One church in another state was gathering for their first in-person worship, and everyone arrived, practicing physical distancing and wearing masks. However, as the service began, one person stood up and shouted, "We refuse to wear masks, and you can't make us." And most of the congregation removed their masks. As we look around our county, we see that there are quite a few people that are not observing the order to wear masks in public and to distance ourselves from others. In both of these cases, there are many that would argue that it is their right to decide if they will wear a mask or not, and no one else should be able to infringe on their freedom by telling them what to do.

But as Christians, we can talk about a different kind of freedom than the freedom to do whatever we choose. Martin Luther spoke about freedom in two ways. He spoke of freedom "from" and freedom "to". According to Luther, as Christians we are freed from sin and death, and condemnation for our sins. In baptism, God makes us heirs of the promise of eternal life, and nothing can take that away from us. This promise frees us from the condemnation of sin and death.

However, at the same time, Luther says that we are set free by this promise in order to love and serve our neighbor. We are set free to be servants of one another. This means that we do what we can to protect our neighbors' wellbeing, and we show concern for their health and safety.

And the parable of the Good Samaritan is an excellent example of this. A man is lying on the side of the road, beaten, wounded, and near death. Both a priest and a Levite pass by the man, leaving him there on the road. They were both expected to observe rules regarding ritual purity, that would have been violated if they needed to touch another individual, or a dead body. In order to be ritually pure and to be able to perform their duties within the temple, they were bound by law to refrain from caring for their neighbor in need.

But then a Samaritan came along the road, and Samaritans were believed to be enemies of the Jewish people. This man, not concerned about purity laws, and not concerned about who was an enemy, simply saw a man in desperate need of help. And so he dressed the man's wounds, took him to an inn, and cared for him.

This Samaritan man was free from the need to maintain ritual purity, and he was free from animosity toward his nation's enemies. And he was free to show care and concern for his neighbor in need, and kneel down in service to him.

This is our call as Christians. We are free from having to keep the purity laws and rituals that have been fulfilled by Christ, and we are now free to love and serve our neighbor. The parable of the Good Samaritan concludes with the statement that a neighbor is one who shows mercy to those in need, and Christ commands that we “go and do likewise.”

One of the ways that we are called to act as neighbors like the Good Samaritan is to wear a mask to protect those who are vulnerable in our community. I recently saw a post on Facebook that shared 3 reasons why we wear masks in public:

- 1) Humility: I don't know if I have COVID as it is clear the people can spread the disease before they have symptoms.
- 2) Kindness: I don't know if the person I am near has a child battling cancer, or cares for their elderly mother. While I might be fine, they may not.
- 3) Community: I want my community to thrive, businesses to stay open, employees to stay healthy. Keeping a lid on COVID helps us all.

None of these reasons has to do with whether we personally like wearing the mask or not. I imagine most of us don't. And it doesn't help that the mask has become a political issue rather than one of public health.

But if you are physically able, I encourage you to wear your mask as a sign, not of your political affiliation, but as a symbol of your Christian affiliation. Our masks can be signs of God's love as we wear them for the sake of our neighbors. As a beloved child of God, you have been set free to love and serve your neighbor. These days, a concrete way that we show our love for

one another is by wearing a mask. (Put mask on.) And if we need to be reminded that this is a sign of our Christian faith, maybe we even wear a mask with a cross on it. (Put cross on mask.)

Because God loves us, God has set us free *from* sin and death, guaranteeing for each of us the promise of eternal life. And at the same time, God's love for us means that we have been freed *to* love and serve one another. So wear a mask, and love one another as Christ loves us. Thanks be to God. Amen.