

7.3.22 – Pentecost 4
“What is True Freedom?”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Isaiah 61:1-3 (NIV) ~ Pam

¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
² to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the Lord
for the display of his splendor.

L: These are the Words of God. C: Thanks be to God!

John 8:27-36 (HCSB) ~ Pam

²⁷ They did not know He was speaking to them about the Father. ²⁸ So Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing on My own. But just as the Father taught Me, I say these things. ²⁹ The One who sent Me is with Me. He has not left Me alone, because I always do what pleases Him.”

Truth and Freedom

³⁰ As He was saying these things, many believed in Him. ³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, you really are My disciples. ³² **You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**”

³³ “We are descendants of Abraham,” they answered Him, “and we have never been enslaved to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will become free’?”

³⁴ Jesus responded, “I assure you: Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. ³⁵ A slave does not remain in the household forever, but a son does remain forever. ³⁶ Therefore, if the Son sets you free, you really will be free.

L: These are Words of True Freedom from Jesus! C: Thanks be to God.

Please pray with me:

Dear Lord our Savior, thank you for the freedom to worship together today and every Sunday. We thank you for the religious freedom to express ourselves through

open and private prayer and to read the Bible openly and privately. Thank you for the freedom to be the body of Christ as a congregation to do more together in missions and ministry than we can do individually. Keep us safe as we celebrate these freedoms. Help us to be attentive today as you and the Holy Spirit speak through your messenger. **“Amen.”**

Happy almost Independence Day! It is a day for some to be with family, cooking out, picnicking, on vacation at the beach, down on the National Mall for the Folklife Festival or the National Fireworks and Concert, or just hanging out with friends. Whatever you do today, enjoy yourselves and the freedoms our country fought for to be who you are both as an American and as a Christian. This is one Sunday where we acknowledge our patriotic and Christian freedom to think and believe with independent minds that our Creator God gave us. We also thank God for the freedom from sin for which Christ died on the cross. And we thank God for the freedom to think and believe with the interdependent minds and bodies empowered by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And yes, we thank God for our ancestors and forefathers who died in revolutions and other wars to protect these freedoms to self-govern and not be ruled by another human being. It is an important day to recognize and praise the Lord for our many freedoms!

Today’s Isaiah passage is a familiar one for July 4th. We are reminded of the trinity in its prophetic words. We cannot help but remember Jesus’ words from Luke 4:18-19. After his temptation in the desert, Jesus goes to the synagogue and reads the Torah. This is the first hint of his life ministry’s purpose: “The Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the

prisoners. . . (vs. 1).” In a word, he was announcing that He was the Messiah! The Hebrew word for Messiah means "the Anointed One” and *Christos* (Christ) is the Greek equivalent for Messiah. Isaiah foretells of a Messiah and Spirit sent from God to save and comfort Israel from the oppressors.

Remember, by the writing of Second Isaiah (where our verses come from), approximately 539 BC, the Israelites had just returned to Jerusalem from Babylonian exile (for almost 50 years!). The prophet tried to make sense of their experience in light of his own mission of encouragement to this post-exilic community. The land is in ruins, the temple destroyed, and they are brokenhearted with despair, yet God promises restoration and freedom. He reminds the people that the Messiah will change their sadness to joy, anoint with oil instead of mourning ashes, clothe them with bright garments, and they will be like stalwart, strong oaks of righteousness, displaying all the glory of God’s beauty and strength. Prisoners will be set free (like in the year of Jubilee as described in Leviticus 25:35-55), the poor will have abundant food and property, the blind will see, the lame walk, and mourners will be comforted. Did this come true then, and how? Yes, Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. Will it come true in our messy world? Yes, Jesus’ Second Return is promised, so I believe it will. You and I may not see it in our lifetime, but **we** can be the kingdom right here, right now to help others see the mercy and grace that comes with salvation. Only through Christ our Messiah will we have restoration and healing. This comforts me in our days of unrest, violence, war, human trafficking, disease, and poverty. My hope is in Christ.

In our Gospel John text, Jesus was still somewhat unknown to the Pharisees, but they began to ask who he was (vs. 19-20):

¹⁹ “Where is your father?” they asked.

Jesus answered, “Since you don’t know who I am, you don’t know who my Father is. If you knew me, you would also know my Father.” ²⁰ Jesus made these statements while he was teaching in the section of the Temple known as the Treasury. But he was not arrested, because his time had not yet come.

Jesus was beginning to identify their hypocrisy as religious leaders (we discussed that last week), yet he was willing to explain what was to come—the Cross and the Resurrection. They could not believe their God had sent a human more powerful than they were. His words “lifted up” in that day meant Crucifixion (remember that a criminal was nailed to a cross, and the cross was then hoisted upward to finish the killing task). We, however, often use those words to mean resurrection, so be careful as you read.

Some Jews believed in what Jesus taught but had no personal relationship with him or God. If they truly understood his salvation truth, they would find it and be liberated from their bondage of sin. Paul wrestles with it and preaches to the Galatians:

²³ Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded **under the law until faith would be revealed.** ²⁴ Therefore the law was our disciplinarian **until Christ came**, so that we might be reckoned as righteous by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are **no longer subject to a disciplinarian,** ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith (Galatians 3:23-26).

Paul is calling that former life “slavery,” while Jesus is referring to Roman rulers and religious rules also. In both Isaiah and John, there was foreign domination that kept some leaders in a superior status while keeping others in subservient roles, not even citizens. Christ came to

break all free from any status or prestige encumbrances; and to reinstate equality through belief in him as the Son of God and the Son of Man. In my interpretation, I am not talking just about political freedom, but rather spiritual freedom from sin.

Yes, today we celebrate America's freedom in 1776 from corrupt Royalty in the early days of our country's formation, and we recognize the sacrificial price this freedom cost. Even **more** importantly for our eternal life is that Christ's sacrifice on the cross brought us independence from the bondage of sin in our lives. It did not free us from the choice to sin or from the consequences of sin, but by our faith, we are saved from that sin, and are sanctified to be salt and light in our world so that others may meet Jesus.

In John 8:33, you can read how the people were obsessed by their ancestry, being the hereditary children of Abraham, the founder of the Jewish nation of Israel. The leaders claimed their legacy was their salvation, and Jesus countered that only belief in him could save them. This was liberating for those who believed there was another way, and it was condemning for those who did not. Jesus insists that when they do witness the Cross (and the Resurrection), they may come to their senses and feel the glorious liberation from their sin and arrogance.

As believers, we too know that God is incarnate through Jesus, and that he is the mind, love, sacrifice, and will of God. Obedient discipleship means accepting this belief, being sustained through Scripture (the Word of God) and recognizing that our true freedom comes not from any form or branch of government but only through HIS truth. In Him only are we free to be the creative, beautiful, smart, loving, and compassionate

humans God **created** us to be. We are truly free through Christ, no matter what is going on around us. Amen? Amen! //

Will you pray with me? God, you are wise to remind us that our only freedom is in you and your Son, Jesus. Help us to be more obedient disciples. We are only slaves to sin if we put our wants and selfishness first, and do not receive salvation. Help us to share the gospel with others in bondage, so that they may know the freedom you died for. As we participate in the Lord's Supper today, may you speak to our hearts reminding us of both your sacrifice and our privilege to worship in freedom. Let your love and light shine through us this week. **Amen.**