

Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

5 Pentecost
July 1, 2007
Fr. Bill McGinty

“Freedoms Journey”

The words that Paul writes to the Galatians are words that he could so easily have spoken to the men and women who gathered at Constitution Hall in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776

“For Freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. For you were called to Freedom, brothers and sisters only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.” (Paul. Gal)

Freedom is a word that stirs the blood and rallies people to its cause more than any other. It is the “cradle of their democracy” Yet, it is also a very Christian word. For from the outset of his ministry Jesus tells his disciples that he has come “to set them free.”

The freedom that Jesus speaks of is a freedom of the Spirit, a freedom to choose what is good and to be released from the chains of all that would bring to that Spirit death albeit war, violence, hate, sin, intolerance, cruelty, disease and malice.

“I have come to lead you to freedom,” cries William Wallace to the Scots at the Battle of Sterling in Braveheart, “but what will you do with that freedom?”

Jesus and St. Paul consistently ask the same thing of their followers. “Now that you are no longer slaves, what will you do with the freedom that God has given you? Will you use it to grow your spirit and become heirs to his Kingdom, or will you choose to return to a life of self indulgence that can only make you slaves to sin once more?”

It is the great dilemma of Freedom which has frustrated nations for hundreds of years. More than any other people it confounds Americans month after month, year after year. Whether it is Federal taxes, local taxes, planning permission or what they can or cannot do on their own property, many ordinary citizens see long hard won freedoms eroded in their own lifetime.

“No taxation without representation” was the great rallying cry of 1776. Yet, voters are continually amazed at what is allowed to slip in to Legislative Bills in Congress, costing billions of dollars. If our liberties and freedom can be eroded politically, then we should be equally concerned that what Jesus has won for us on the cross can equally be taken away.

At every Baptism, we are again reminded of that first invitation that brought Christ into our lives. Those three words are repeated in today’s Gospel: “Come follow me.”

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At seventeen, eighteen and nineteen, those words had all the fire and appeal a young person could ever hope to hear. Mission, Evangelism, Gospel, Outreach, all could be found right there in Jesus' Gospel invitation "Come follow me."

At nineteen "Come follow me" is a Gospel adventure every bit as exciting as anything you would find in an "Indiana Jones" movie.

So, how come, we all allow ourselves to get Gospel fatigue by 50, and church burn-out by 52? Do Jesus' words have less appeal, or is it that 100 lbs later we just find it harder to keep up with the man, who would give everything for the poor, the sick, the homeless, and the oppressed?

In our deep heart's core we all know we want to be 19 again. At 19 everything is possible. At 59 we have to check that our legs still work before we descend the stairs in the morning.

St Paul today gives us a taste for renewal, a taste for getting back to the spirit of 19. "Live by the spirit I say, for the fruits of the spirit bring love, joy peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. For if we live by the Spirit we will be guided by the Spirit too.

"Renewal" is the secret to our response to Jesus invitation. We need to renew. We do it in every other facet of our life, home, fitness, business and transportation. Whether we are doing a house make-over, or moving, just because we need a change, we all know what a "pick me up" that can be. Being promoted at work or changing jobs can have that same affect. Losing weight, getting in shape, changing the car, may not take us physically back to 19, but it feels better than 59 and counting.

We do from time to time need to be spiritually refreshed. It is an important part of our spiritual journey. Whether we consider a pilgrimage, a retreat or reading a book, we know that the spiritual benefits are many. This summer in a very short time, your Vestry will retire to the top of Cummings Hill Road for the day. It is called a Vestry Retreat, but really it is an opportunity to recoup,, regroup and seek a vision for the future.

All of us should have the opportunity to do that in our lives, whether it is individually or as a family up in Maine or down in Florida. We need time to reflect, relax and re-order our priorities.

Next September we are hoping to plan a Parish Pilgrimage to England to rediscover our Anglican roots. Pilgrimages are as old as Christianity itself. They have a very definite purpose. They strive to put us in touch with our past, so that we can re-evaluate our present and plan for our future.

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From Westminster Abbey to Canterbury and from Gloucester to the Ancient Northern City of Chester we will seek out all there is to cherish of an Anglican tradition that is 1600 years old. Perhaps in seeking how those who went before responded to the words: “Come follow me.” We too will find inspiration on our journey also.

From North Wales to York and Durham we will find Christianity that first arrived with the Romans. That tends to bring the Gospel and the words of Jesus very close. Finally we will stand on the shore of the Scottish Isle of Iona where Colombo first brought the Christian faith to Scotland.

There will be connections there for many people on that rocky island where he built his first monastery. Maybe it will be in the knowledge that it was the same stone from the same Ice Age that built this Cobblestone church and the same words” “Come follow me” that inspired him also to set out on that great Christian adventure.

Freedom, Follow me. Faith, they are surely the foundation stones of our lives as Christian people.

On Wednesday, we will nationally and as families pause to honor our Independence Day and the men and women who made that Freedom possible. As we do so and celebrate the day, let us hear in Jesus words: “Come follow me” an invitation to that spiritual freedom we need to give our lives meaning and to bring us home to our God.

Let us pray:

God our Father, we thank you that the Spirit of Freedom that rose among our fore-fathers is today still enshrined in our Nation. We pray that her children may esteem her values, protect her freedoms and cherish her Godliness. And may we cherish our faith and always seek to follow you Lord Jesus through the ups and downs of our life’s journey.

Amen+

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