

“I’m Free!” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 5 – July 2, 2023

- I. **Matthew 10:40** – ⁴⁰“Whoever receives you receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me.”
- II. **In the 1960s, the Peace Corps recruited Americans to serve the world.**
 - a. My grandfather passed away in 1961, so my grandmother decided to join the Peace Corps to be a teacher in Jimma, Ethiopia for a couple of years.
 - b. Maybe you remember their slogan, “The toughest job you’ll ever love.”
 - c. The idea that President John F Kennedy had in getting the Peace Corps started was to bring skilled help to developing countries around the world.
 - d. In our Gospel reading today, it’s the final part of Jesus’ instructions to His followers before He sends them out to witness for Him.
 - i. But this journey is more than bringing skilled help to different places, it’s about bringing the saving Gospel message to people who otherwise have no hope.
 - ii. Jesus compares this mission and following Him to taking up a cross.
 1. Can you imagine what His disciples were thinking?
 - a. A cross is a torture device used by the Romans to humiliate and execute people.... Hmmmm...
 - b. Am I ready to go on a mission like this?
 - iii. Jesus also shares a promise in a way that might not be perfectly clear as we read through this passage - “Whoever receives you receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” (vs 40)
 1. Whenever we have His message, or His words, then Jesus is there... Just as later in Matthew He promises to be there whenever we go and make disciples of all nations – “And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)
 2. Jesus is promising that He goes with us as we reach out into the world and witness about Him... we are not alone.
- III. **Jesus has a way of changing our understandings and expectations.**
 - a. For example, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” (vs 34)
 - i. But wait, isn’t Jesus the “Prince of Peace”? (Isaiah 9:6)
 - ii. He even says He gives us His peace in John 14:27.
 - iii. Yes, certainly Jesus gives peace between God and us, and we can live with other Christians in peace by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - b. Yet, the world is not capable of peace, and will war against the Good News, and who Jesus is, until He returns...
 - c. Our nation will soon celebrate Independence Day.
 - i. Many people sacrificed everything, including their lives, to make America a free country.

- ii. The freedoms we have today allow us to worship, have political views, and make choices that are not available to the citizens of many other countries.
- iii. Has all this liberty brought us peace?
 - 1. You can quickly see the division that the world brings into politics, our freedoms, and our country.
 - 2. Many people are of the mind to destroy what they see as divisive – including religion.
 - 3. Sadly, it's even Christians who can bring this division.
- d. Lots of people love to shout, "I'm free!"
 - i. Which often means, I get to do what I want in a selfish way.
 - ii. The truth is, these people are not free, but in bondage to the world.
 - iii. The thing about freedom is that we are always connected to something – or committed to what makes us free...
 - iv. And the question is, does America make me truly free, or Jesus?
- e. The point I'm making is that Jesus Himself is God's peace, brought into the world for us, while at the same time a flash point for the world to reject.
 - i. As we consider following Jesus as our Teacher and Leader, we should not expect the people around us to be at peace.
 - ii. Many of you know the verse from Galatians where Paul talks about freedom – "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." (Galatians 5:13)
 - 1. Yes, this passage is saying that the Old Testament requirements are no longer a part of the New Testament Christian life, but it also helps us to see that freedom leads to worldly temptations and selfish ambitions.
 - 2. We must be careful to use our freedom not for selfish gain, but to share the love of Christ....
 - iii. Freedom in Christ transcends anything the world tries to provide.

IV. **Sacrifice is a big word on both Memorial Day and Independence Day.**

- a. So many sacrificed their lives for our freedom – and I have a deep sense of gratitude for them all.
 - i. The gratitude I have for them keeps me involved in directing our country through voting and making changes as necessary.
- b. Even more so, I feel a deep sense of gratitude and love toward my Savior Jesus for the sacrifice He made for me in His suffering and death.
 - i. The big difference is that His death was not one of millions in the name of life, liberty, and justice... His death was one for all.
 - ii. God Himself, Jesus our Lord, came to be the sacrifice that was sufficient to save us all from our sins.

- iii. I don't want anyone to lessen the gift of freedom and peace that Jesus provided through His sacrifice...
 - 1. It wasn't just that He gave His life for a great cause, like so many others throughout history...
 - 2. No, Jesus was the sacrifice –
 - a. He was the perfect man... the only human being to live up to God's perfect standards... the only perfect sacrifice.
 - b. He was also God... and only God could be sufficient to pay for the sins of the whole world – including yours and mine.
- c. From the cross – and through the open tomb as Jesus lived again – we now have the gift of salvation – eternal freedom in Christ.
 - i. All of these gifts were delivered to us through faith – a gift in itself by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - ii. Now, in gratitude and love for all that God has done for us, we are all the more encouraged to follow Him – even if it means hard times...

V. **Yes, faith in Jesus comes with a call... to follow.**

- a. It's not forced upon us, but the sense of gratitude and love we have for our Lord and Savior makes following Him a loving response.
- b. Of course He first loved us (1 John 4:19), and now He even promises to be with us in our journey through this difficult world.
- c. Jesus calls us, just as He did all those disciples in the past, to follow Him.
- d. We understand freedom in a different way... not so much whatever I want to do, but more that we are forgiven and free from the bondage of sin and death.
 - i. That is a freedom that Jesus wants all people to have – and we are the messengers... in fact Jesus says that those who hear us are hearing Jesus and the Father who sent Him. (vs 40)
- e. We are the body of Christ – the ones who are Jesus to the people around us, while He waits in heaven to return.
- f. Maybe some of you have heard of a “monstrance”, which is a metal stand shaped like a cross with a small glass case in the center...
 - i. Roman Catholics place in the case a consecrated host, the body of Jesus... and some will pray to a monstrance... or other times they bless the community by carrying it around town – that is the day of Corpus Christi.
 - ii. Martin Luther rejected monstrances because Jesus only told us, “Take and eat.” Jesus didn't say, “Put Me in a case and carry Me around.”
 - iii. Luther also said that those who receive Holy Communion are living monstrances... That is, you who commune carry Jesus with you.

- iv. Think of all the places where Jesus' body and blood will bring blessing today as you go from here.
- g. If you follow Jesus and take up your cross, you will certainly face opposition and struggles... but always remember, Jesus goes with you.
- h. It may seem like a tough job, but as Jesus is with us, we are filled with love that pours out into the lost.
- i. Enjoy your Independence Day this week, but always remember where real freedom is found – faith in Jesus and living for Him, Amen.