

6 PENTECOST (LECTIONARY 14) JULY 4, 2010 CYCLE "C"

TITLE: WE REJOICE IN FREEDOM NOT IN SELF- INDULGENCE BUT IN LOVING SERVICE.

READINGS: Isa. 66:10-14, Ps. 66:1-9, Gal. 6:1-6) 7-16, Luke 10:1-11,16-20

Today the United States of America is 234 years old. Happy Birthday to us! Yet compared to other governments in history we are a mere child. Egypt, China, Japan, Rome and Greece make our history look like an infant. The fourth of July celebrates the establishment of our democracy. I love the way Johnny Carson described it: "Unlike communism," he said, "democracy does not mean having just one ineffective political party; it means having two ineffective political parties. Democracy is welcoming people from other lands, and giving them something to hold onto usually a mop or a leaf blower. And, democracy means that with proper timing and scrupulous bookkeeping, anyone can die owing the government a huge amount of money." An American was staying in London. He was introduced to a man from Edinburgh, Scotland. The Scotchman asked him "An' what country do ya belong tae?" "The greatest country in the world!" replied the American. "Mon! so dae I," Replied the Scotsman, "but ya donna speak like a Scotsman."

I have made a personal rule never to preach about politics. But celebrating the freedoms we enjoy in America is a different story. I think God has graciously gifted us with liberty and therefore we are free, since true freedom comes from God. But with freedom comes great responsibility. We are not free to live excessive lives. We are not free to pursue selfish ends. Our freedom should never make us infidels, unbelievers! Freedom is not license, which means doing whatever we want or feel like doing, without control, without consideration for others or any kind of restraint. Freedom is not self-indulgence. Paul puts it this way, "For we are 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." Gal.5:13. What he is saying is we are blessed with freedom but our freedom requires righteous behavior. It is in the next verse (14) that Paul reminds us of the second greatest commandment of Jesus, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity bought two dilapidated buildings in New York City's South Bronx area and spent \$100,000 to restore them and turn them into homeless shelters. But New York's bureaucrats told the nuns that under the city's universal access law, they were forbidden to open the shelter. Why? One

building lacked a \$50,000 elevator to accommodate homeless men who might be unable to walk. The sisters suggested that they could carry any such men to the upper floors themselves, if necessary, as they do in Calcutta. No way, said the bureaucrats that would insult the dignity of the homeless. So the Missionaries of Charity, who couldn't afford another \$50,000 for the project, had to scrap it and were forced to leave hundreds of homeless men sleeping in the street. Sometimes the freedom to carry out Jesus' commandment of love is difficult to fulfill.

It is easy to see what happens when our freedom is misused or perverted. Paul lists some things for us, "Now the works of the flesh are obvious; fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing..." Gal.5:19-21. Does that sound like our society? Are these not taken for granted? Are they not condoned in America today? A recent survey tells us that only 13% of Americans still believe in all Ten Commandments. Nine out of ten people admit they lie regularly and for 10 million dollars, 7% would kill a stranger. How very sad that is!

True freedom, the freedom our founding fathers professed, demands responsibility. Have we lost sight of the biblical principles that once guided us? It seems so. "Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh," says Paul. We must remember that moral guidance comes from God, not what someone else may value or what we may think would be expedient. If we know that freedom which comes from God, if we exercise the freedom our founding fathers acknowledged and believed in, then we know real freedom upon which this nation is built. Our freedom is knowing that no power on earth can destroy us. Freedom is looking into a mirror and seeing there a person of integrity. Freedom is knowing our sins are forgiven and living in that peace and security. Paul tells us how we are assured that we live in that freedom. It is when we possess, "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Gal.5:22-23 Those are the characteristics, says Paul, of persons who belong to Christ Jesus. Those are the characteristics of people who are genuinely free.

Let us give thanks to God today for this land in which we live. And let us lay claim to that freedom that is our birthright in Christ. Only when we are joined with Christ can we ever say we are truly free. For it is Christ who has set us free. **Amen.**

Pastor Barney