

Freedom

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Lk 10:1-11, 16-20

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Lexington, Massachusetts, April 19, 1775

130 American “minutemen,” all ill-trained volunteers,
and 300 seasoned, trained, regular British troops stood face to face.

A blast of a musket was “the shot heard around the world.”

It was the beginning of the War of Independence.

Our War of Independence was fought to be rid of tyranny,

to be rid of others deciding for us, determining our lives, dictating our laws.

The rebellion begun in 1775 was to win our freedom.

But freedom comes at a cost.

Our freedom as a nation came at cost.

But the cost not in lives given and treasure spent,

but the cost of God’s own, precious, pure Son.

Our freedom as a nation was not mere freedom from foreign control.

Our freedom as a nation

was the freedom to live as the people God made us.

The Declaration of Independence begins

*When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary
for one people to dissolve the political bands
which have connected them with another,
and to assume among the powers of the earth,
the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature
and of Nature's God entitle them,
a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires
that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.
We hold these truths to be self-evident,
that all men are created equal,
that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,
that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*

We understand today that the word “men” to include women,

to include enfeebled persons unable to labor or lead,

to include children.

All people are created equal.

All people have unalienable rights,

not *deserve* our rights, but *endowed* with rights because of simply created by God.

All people have unalienable rights,

not because we were born on American soil or took an oath or pay taxes,

but because we exist.

All people have the right to live, to have the basics necessary for life.

All people have the right to equal treatment under the law,

to conduct their lives as they wish and not as another would dictate.

All people have the right to pursue their dreams,

to work to better their lives,

to worship, create and celebrate in their own way.

So what does it say about our nation today

when there are over 200 immigrant detention centers in the United States,

more than communist China, more than the Islamic Republic of Iran,

the most of any nation in the world,

and that over 60% are detained in *private for-profit* prisons.

According to federal government data, GEO Group receives more taxpayer dollars

*for immigration detention than any other ICE contractor.
In FY 2017, GEO Group received \$184 million,
followed by Corrections Corporation of America/CoreCivic
that received \$135 million for immigration detention related service obligations.¹*

Both are for-profit corporations;
there is nothing wrong with corporations making money,
but as a nation we do need to be vigilant in guarding against
profiteering at people's expense,
and against corporations directing policy and using taxpayer money
contrary to American values and unalienable rights.

For-profit corporations seek to reduce costs so as to maximize profits,
and those incarcerated, without ability to assert rights, bear the burden of cost cuts
of over-crowded cells, inadequate food, unsanitary conditions
and separation of families.

It now costs us taxpayers an average of \$159 per person per day detained by immigration.
\$159 per day per person we pay for-profit corporations
for holding human beings in sub-human conditions.

Another problem is that of conflating immigration with criminalization.

The U.S. immigration enforcement system is intimately intertwined with the criminal justice system, as exemplified by the long-standing U.S. practice of using prisons to confine immigration detainees. This practice has been largely banned in most major developed nations, particularly in Europe where European Union directives provide that immigration detainees be kept in specially designed facilities separate from criminal-related prisons.²

We make no distinction between those who *disrupt* society and harm others
from those who only want to *improve* society, work hard, raise families and stay safe.
American mind-set equates criminality with seeking work and safety.

You have seen or read the disturbing stories on our southern boarder.

ABC News recently reported,

*Customs and Border Protection reported in mid-May that it had 16,000 people in its custody, many in cells equipped with nothing more than concrete benches and an exposed toilet. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, whose facilities are built for longer-term detention, houses more than 40,000 people... "We are concerned that overcrowding and prolonged detention represent an immediate risk to the health and safety of DHS agents and officers, and to those detained," the [Justice Department] inspector general's report states.
Included were photos showing women and children, including an infant in diapers, piled shoulder to shoulder on the floor of one holding pen.
Another photo showed some 88 men crammed into a cell meant for 41,
with one pressing a cardboard sign to a window reading: "Help, 40 Days Here."³*

The official policy limits to 3 days.

America was founded on something better.

America stands for something better.

God made us free to be created, caring and conscientious guardians
of all of God's kingdom on earth.

Martin Luther describes our freedom as:

*A Christian is the most free lord of all, subject to none;
a Christian is the most dutiful servant of all, subject to every one.⁴*

¹ United States Immigration Detention, <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/americas/united-states>

² Ibid.

³ Jarring images of border cells surface ahead of July 4, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/sites-states-eyed-permanent-child-detention-centers-64117813>

⁴ Martin Luther, "Concerning Christian Liberty."

Most people like the first half
 and those who most forcefully assert their patriotism prefer to stop there.
 A Christian has no master and laws are for the lawless.
 The Christian faith becomes a mark of patriotism
 and is reckoned among many social virtues.
 They are half right.
 Jesus Christ in his sacrifice on the cross has made us free from sin
 and free from the demands of the law which constrains sin.⁵
 No longer need we prove ourselves good and worthy and right,
 for Jesus Christ has already made us so and baptism is the mark for each of us.
 Jesus Christ has endowed us with unalienable rights,
 among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.
 We are free to live as God intends.
 Freedom is a God-given act of grace.
 That part is appealing and claimed by many.

But Martin Luther includes a second part to freedom,
 that of slave to all.
 By Christ we are made free to live *as God* intends.
 We are made free to be the kind of people *God* meant us to be.
 We are free to do as we please and live as we want.
 The key question, then, is *what* do we please, *what kind* of life do we want?
 If we truly do live by faith in the grace of Jesus Christ,
 we will want to do *what pleases God*,
 we will conduct ourselves in ways that further *God's goodness*.
 So freedom *from* something, freedom *from* tyranny,
 is always freedom *for* something, freedom *for* goodness *as determined by God*.
 Freedom *for* something is freedom to be *servant* for the goodness God desires.

The United States of America is the boldest experiment in history
 of *government of the people, by the people, for the people*.
 I would even say that The United States of America
 is humanities noblest achievement to date
 in carrying out God's purposes on earth,
 that of respecting the person,
 protecting the vulnerable,
 providing and sustaining the lives of all,
 ensuring the ability to pursue dreams.
 Yet I am concerned that this past holiday,
 what has come to symbolize America most, the image of what makes America great,
 is tanks on our streets and military jets overhead.
 What has become the symbol all that America stands for
 is not unalienable rights, but military might.
 What does it mean for us,
 when the majority of our tax dollars and the predominance of our overseas presence
 is *military*, exceeding that of aid and diplomacy and nation-building.
 I am concerned that critique of our military *industry* and it's hold on American psyche
 quickly jumps to heightened emotions, questions of loyalty,
 and implied criticism of our dedicated soldiers,
 that those same emotions and heightened sensitivities are *not* so quickly given to
 single moms struggling to make ends meet,
 innocent children incarcerated in Texas,
 legal immigrants working 2 and 3 jobs to support their families,
all also contributing to a better America.

⁵ John 8:36.

I have high regard for our soldiers, but concerned that our emotions and support for them
insulate the military industry from critique and question.

I am concerned that our military *industry*,
supported by the taxes of everyday citizens,
and now celebrated by national holidays,
has become our *national god and irrefutable truth*.

To even raise the question raises angry objection.

Jesus sent out 70 disciples “on ahead of him.”

They had been learning from Jesus,
watching him restore and reconcile,
observing his behavior exemplifying what God’s kingdom and rule is about.

He gave them instructions and prepared them for what would come.

“Behold, I send you out a lambs in the midst of wolves...”

Lambs, not conquering forces employing violence as policy.

Lambs, not aggression to assert one’s way.

Lambs, not entrenched powers of self-interest.

No purse, no bag, no sandals, no resources and build-up so as to be independent,
but when entering, grant “Peace be to this house.”

Connect, share, get to know your neighbor,
seek the welfare of one another,
work together,
eat and drink together,
heal.

And declare, as all this takes place,
“The kingdom of God has come near.”

What makes America great
is neighbor watching out for neighbor.

What makes America great
is assuring that each other has the safety and opportunity
to pursue their dreams and to work to improve their lives.

What makes America great
is the diversity of cultures and ideas and perspectives,
requiring effort on our part to hear and honor,
but which widens and enriches and nurtures this nation for all.

What makes America great
is the bold experiment of people governing as best we can,
for the good of all,
with the rights and freedom God has given.

Let’s make American great by asserting life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness
be possible for all.

Amen.