

Sermon Psalm 16 Galatians 5:1, 13-26 I John 4:7-12 July 1, 2007
Out of Africa - Freedom's Cry

Announcements -

A word of special and very grateful thanks to you, for the privilege you provided me, to use some of my study leave and vacation, so that I could, along with my daughter Sarah, again be part of a Medical Mission Experience in South Africa. Two years ago I went with Sarah and my son Andy and his wife Cari.

This year Sarah and I were again at Eisikiwini, in the Northeast corner of South Africa, working among the Zulu people in that area, and working with Pastor Isaiah Mafu, and his wife Mercy, and the two growing Churches they serve. My son Andy and his wife Cari and son Drew, were and are still, also again in Africa, but this year Andy is providing relief for three months for a medical missionary in the northwestern part of Africa, in the nation of Togo.

I will be saying more about Sarah's and my experience in the meditation, but I wanted to thank you for your support of me as I continue to exercise my passion for mission work - As you know well by now I have a strong commitment to the idea that whatever faith we have is best known, and is best grown within us, and in the world, by the ways we reach out to others

In John, Jesus said, I give you a new commandment, that you love one another, even as I have loved you. And it is when we care deeply, in Christ's name and spirit, for the people around us, in the Church, the community, and the wide world around us - it is then that we best show and share God's love.

And I can tell again, from very personal experience, the mission for Christ is alive and active in Africa..... Thank you again for letting be a part of it again this year.

And - the mission for Christ is alive and well here at OLCC,P. Our Young People returned from West Virginia last week - and you can see plans being made for further mission efforts this year and early next year.

We are, we seek to be, ambassadors of Christ....

Sermon

Scripture - On this Sunday before America's Independence Day celebrations, the Scripture chosen for the day comes from Galatians - and Paul's words to us about freedom. And I will add words from I John that I used in worship last Sunday in South Africa.

Hear the Word of the Lord

The Psalmist sang out in Psalm 16 - You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy....

And Paul told the Galatians - For freedom, Christ has set us free.

And John wrote - If we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Our deepest joy in life, our greatest freedom, are both grounded in the depth and strength of our love - for God and for one another. Bound to love, we are freed by love to know and enjoy life to its fullest.

Please pray with me.... Lord of life, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of these your faithful and loving people, be acceptable in your sight, and your Good Word to us this day, in Christ. Amen.

Sermon -

I come this morning, after some 48 hours of travel and a little sleep, from nearly two weeks in South Africa. And I come to you with both sad news - and very good news.

The troubles in Africa are very real, very great, deeply disturbing - and yet there is much more than a hint of hope that excites me. I come back with encouraging images of a growing ministry for Christ among the young people.

In the face of AIDS - which is wiping out so many people in their middle years - hurting the economy, burdening families, the primary aid givers. In the face of ancient tribal conflicts and the selfish greedy leadership in so many places - In the face of grinding poverty - and the growing Muslim pressure and persecuting presence -there is now- I believe, across Africa - also an increasing desire and cry for Freedom, for the kind of freedom that is grounded and founded only in Christ.

At least where Sarah and I and the 16 other team members were, the fervency of the people's faith is remarkable - and in some ways makes me a bit ashamed at how quiet we tend to be about the greatest news on earth. The people we met worship God in Christ, as Lord and Savior of their lives.

Joyfully and faithfully they take God's word seriously, and hear its call to obedience. They see and have proven, that obedience to God's law in love is their true guide and greatest hope in the face of illness, poverty, suffering and death.

They sing with wonderful enthusiasm and joyous rythm - and one song offers good advice to us all... Just slow down, take a look around, Jesus is here. He made the mountains, he made the sea, Just slow down. Take a look around. Jesus in here.

In a sense it's the message of Paul in Galatians, and of John, and of this Sacrament. Jesus is here - listen to his message - let his love dwell more deeply in you. Paul says... the fruit of the Spirit of Christ is love... And John says - God is love, and if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Can there be any freedom greater than to be at one, at peace, in harmony with the power of all life?

In brief outline form I want to share with you now the message I shared last Sunday with the two churches in South Africa, two churches filled with and led by mostly young people under 25. And if they are getting and sharing the message of faith in Christ, of the goodness of God, of the way of Christian love - then...

There is hope in Africa, and for Africa, and, per chance, a word of hope from Africa for us in America - who risk, in our idolatry of the things we possess, the loss of our relationship with the creator of all things - in whom alone is our hope. Because... Blessed are the people, only the people, whose Lord is God.

Jesus told us that his new commandment was simpler for us to remember than the 10 - or even the two great commandments. He gave us one commandment - to love one another. And said it was the sum total of all the law and prophets.

We know what love is - Jesus showed us, and Paul told us. Love is patient, kind, not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude or selfish or irritable or resentful -

love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things and never ends.

And in First John - the writer says three things about love and - about how love works in the world. Three things we talked about in S. Africa last Sunday.

Love is first of all - God's gift to us. It is also God's gift to us of God's life saving, life renewing, life fulfilling forgiveness. And love is the most essential gift we have to give to each other.

And its all laid out for us, demonstrated for us, made clear to us, every time we gather at this table and remember the very heart of God's love for us in Christ.

Love is the Lord of life's gift to us, God's gift of the very heart of God's self to us. It is interesting to note that the writer John uses the word love 107 times. And in fact, the only word, proper noun, used more often than love in the Bible is the Word Lord. Interesting. Lord and Love = the two most used words. Maybe It's because of what John said - God is love.

God so loved the world - God gave us the greatest sign of God's love - God gave God's very self to us in the form of his only son - Jesus Christ - our Lord and Savior. God gave us what we could not and can not earn -

It is the powerful - and sometimes, too many times, sad fact about love. It is always a gift. You cannot make someone love you. You can help others not, not love you - but you cannot make some one love you. But... in fact..

That is the greatest good news there is - because God is Good - All the Time. God always has and always will love us - and give us the gift of God's love. ... and does it over and over again.. That's what this sacrament says - God gives - gives us God's love - and everything we need to live - now and forever.

This is my body - my blood - my life for you - that you may live.

But at the heart of God's gift of love is forgiveness. God loves not because we are so good, so kind and gentle and compassionate and giving - we aren't.

If we were - what a different place this world would be. No grinding poverty - hunger and death - in some parts of the world - even of our country - and - yes - filthy richness in other parts of the world.

We are sinners and we don't love God or each other with anything like all of our hearts and minds and souls and strength.

Someone has pointed out - if we shared just a bit more - if - we tithed as a Church - our budget would be well over two million dollars - our mission giving could be not just 30% of all we spend - but 50% - we would be able to do more for others here, with the cost of more space more quickly paid, and more ministries in our community, in Detroit, and for the work of Christ in Africa or Mexico, to show them God's love.

But - even when we are more selfish than sharing, when we are less than loving to each other, and to strangers, than we should be... God never stops loving us. He forgives us - and gives us ever new days to sing and show God's praise. This Body broken for us - the bread of life.

And that's God's call to us - to love one another - to forgive and to love. And the black people of Esikiwinnie - who suffered so terribly under Aparthide - led by Bishop Tutu and other Christian leaders -

They have shown how the power of Forgiving love can heal wounds and offer new ways to live in peace. And - the God who gives us God's love - God's forgiving love, over and over and over again - very simply says - give your love to one another - even as I have given my love to you.

Love is God's gift - God's gift of forgiveness - a gift God has given to us and called us to give it to one another. Here is the symbol - this table - symbols of the gift of life, bread and drink - give to you - just because you need it and have come here. And then that gift - shared by you with one another. This is love.

The poet said it this way.... He drew a circle that cut me out - but love and I had the wit to win - we drew a circle that drew him in.

At the end of worship in South Africa - the people greet one another - the preacher comes to the front and, then, singing wonderfully, everyone greets the preacher and each other until everyone has been greeted and a great circle has been formed. It is a wonderful reminder - if God so loves us in Jesus Christ - we should also love one another.

In South Africa again- I experienced the power of God's love, through the love of God's people drawing me into the circle of their love. They have renewed my will draw the circle of my love wider and wider. I hope this day, you will feel that call of God to you, here. In Christ. Amen.

David W. Robertson, Pastor