

Sermon - Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 and Romans 7:15-25, 8:1-2
July 6, 2008

For a Nation and Its People – Freedom
The Weight of Sin – The Load Lifted

God's got the whole world in God's hands, God's got you and me brother, and sister, the whole world in God's hands. Yes. Yes - and that's the promise of Jesus' words - My yoke is easy And my burden is light.

And of Paul's words - For the law of the Spirit of life in Jesus has set you free. And that's the promise of the two special symbols that are a part of our Worship this morning – this Sunday after the 4th. Of July - Our Independence Celebration.

The two symbols of God's forever love and care for us, and of our true freedom, the bread and cup of the Sacrament of Communion. Even beyond what our country can offer us. Not just our freedom to hope for and work for and believe in the truth that all Persons are created equal with the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness... But our freedom in faith from the fear of sin and even death.

It is the hope in the line from the hymn - Long may our land be bright with freedom's holy light. Yes... Freedom's holy light. We celebrate that truth here – at this table. Freed – through our faith in Jesus Christ from the weight of sin.

And – in truth – when we wave our flag - we salute too Freedom's holy light.

Please pray with me.

Lord – Of God and Country we sing - let freedom ring. May the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your faithful and loving people, be acceptable in Your sight – and your good word to us this day. Amen.

The weight of sin - we feel it - Paul's word hit home - we feel it as persons – and as a nation - The good that I would do I do not – the evil I would not do, that I do -

Simple things - the right word to say, a compliment to a co-worker, to a friend, to a loved one - and we don't say it... Or the harsh word we know won't make things better, and we say it anyway. And though it sometimes seems as if no one has any conscience left. Or a sense of shame or guilt. The sins are there, and the weight of sin weighs on our lives and our society. We feel the pain of others actions - and the lack of self control has led us to lead the world in the percent of our people in prison.

The sins of our society are weighing us down - Riley – the TV commentator makes the point - Teen girls in Mass. Race to get pregnant - and revel in the publicity. A combination of factors – greed on the part of financial and political leaders, and on our part when we buy more than we can afford -

And all of this kind of behavior has cost us as a nation - Even our arrogance in our actions as a country has led to the loss of respect in the world and has encouraged revenge in the way other countries treat our need for oil... And – we pay the price - the weight of sin.

But if we feel the weight of sin - and I think we do... Can we feel the of weight being lifted? Do we know enough about our faith to know how Freedom's Holy light shines in our lives, how we are cleansed and renewed - How it helps us see the truth of Jesus' words, and Paul's - That if we are burdened - troubled - we can find relief in Jesus Christ, we can take his yoke upon us – for it is easy - and light.

It is – it is - simply to put our whole faith and trust in God's promise to us in him, That in and through him we are forgiven and given new life....as Christ we find freedom from the burdens that life lays upon us.

Even from the burden of life's pain and suffering and death... Christ's gift to us, in his life and suffering and death and resurrection, is a gift of hope that makes life day by day, better, more hopeful, easier to live... Jesus' yoke is easy.

In Christ we are free from the law of sin and death - in him is life and life Abundant. We celebrate this always good news.

And one woman's story tells the tale of what freedom is about, and can be about for us as persons and as a nation. And She says her life has been marked by 3 miracles. 3 life changing faith experiences. 3 not uncommon issues in her life, in our lives, but 3 events that changed her life and deepened her faith and trust in God...

Three times she was reminded of God's grace and loving care... She describes her experiences as miracle... And I could not help but think of her as I read Jesus' words recorded in Matthew - *Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

Christ's way is narrow - it is a matter of some hard choices - of cross bearing - of choosing sometimes against what others want you to do - even family. But the end result is a life of less worry, and more confidence and joy and happiness.

To be sure the woman's miracles were personal - they dealt with her heavy Burdens - and with her sense of relief and comfort and energy and hope.

That came suddenly and miraculously into her life... But she has no doubt about the source of her relief, of her miracles, of her freedom from fear and of new hope. Three times in her life, she says, she faced what seemed to be incredibly dire circumstances. Her young son's critical chronic health condition that had her facing his death over and over again - and then - she says - there came a moment, amidst all the anxiety, all the worry and praying. She walked into his hospital room and simply knew she had to let go of her son, and her relentless worry about him - she simply had to trust that God's promise of God's love for her and for her son was true. No matter what.

And - from that point forward she found more ease in her life - and - was it her ease and renewed faith - her son improved and grew into his full life.

And it happened again - and she says - you would think you would learn to trust God's Word after you experienced its power - But facing her husband's critical illness she again became desperate in her anxiety and fear - until - until - a moment came again, when she knew, just knew again to let go - to stop beating on God's door, and to start believing again in God's promises in Christ. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. Did her husband live - no - but she lived in greater peace and believes that brought greater peace to her husband in his final days.

And she says - it came again - this time in the face of the burden of her own health concerns - And she can identify with Paul - for all she had experienced of what she fully believes was God's grace and goodness - miracles of God's care. Still again she was not trusting God, but troubling God with her incessant demands. Believing one thing but living another. Trusting God and not trusting at the same time.

Until - until - again - the truth of God's word, and her own remembrance of it, led her to live again - more by faith than by certainty.... To trust more than to know, and so to know the wonder of God's love.

And - for her the miracle happened again - the burden was not hers to carry alone - The cross of anxiety over her health concerns - is that the yoke that Jesus was talking about - being yoked to him - became easier, much easier to carry. And there is in this a gift of freedom.

I'm not for sure certain about how all this works for a nation - facing its own peculiar kind of fears and worries as our nation does in this difficult time. As true as I know it be for a person - for the woman and her miracles, and miracles of my own, I am not sure how anxiety relieving, hope renewing, faith in God's promises in Christ can change a nation's life.

But I suspect the answer lies in the faith – the individual faith - of the people I suspect that even as the wonder of God's grace gave new hope and deeper calm to someone who put her whole trust in God - So as more and more people in a nation sense this same truth – that the future is more about faith than it is about fighting ones way to success.

More about faithfulness and trust in and obedience to God's word and God's way - that it is about the truth of freedom being a gift - about the truth the Psalmist sang - happy is the nation whose God is the Lord...

Troubles in life - consequences of sin that weigh us down – yes; But we have been given the good news of freedom - No condemnation – the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and death.

And - as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup – you show the Lord's Death – and the promise of life - in him and for you. Freedom – yes. Taste and see - this way – this way of life by faith is good. Here is forgiveness and new life. Come. Amen.

David W. Robertson, Pastor