

Title: “He Gave Me Liberty”

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Ezek. 2:1-5 & Mark 6:7-12

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Focus: Our freedom comes not from independence but on our dependence on Jesus.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

“Give me liberty or give me death.” These are the words were spoken by Patrick Henry, a delegate of Virginia, in a speech that he gave on March 23 of 1775 and they have been credited with convincing the founding fathers of our nation to take up arms and fight the British. His speech, his call to arms, was a battle cry to the early citizens. “There is no longer any room for hope,” he proclaimed earlier in his message. “[W]e must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight! An appeal to arms and to the God of Hosts is all that is left us!” Oppressed by the British, unable to secure their freedom by peaceful means, he stated that “there is no longer any room for hope” and so freedom would have to be won through violence. And so, on that day a decision was made to gather those who could take up arms and by the command and provisions of the infant government, and fight for freedom, to defend themselves from the growing British forces, for they had no other hope than that which they themselves could create. And so, on that day the decision was made to create for themselves a hope, to create for themselves a freedom from this oppression. So, they went out, weapon in hand, and by their own blood, shed for their own countrymen, they won a freedom from the chains that previously bound them. And on July 2nd the Continental Congress voted in favor of independence, and on July 4th the formal declaration was adopted. America was free. Well, they could *claim* that they were free but they would still be oppressed by the British for several more years.

But when it was all over, when the battle had been won and their freedom secured, they would celebrate the best way that they knew how - by gathering together, as one people who shared the common bond of freedom. And once gathered, they would read the declaration of independence - the documented that secured their freedom.

Take a moment and you can juxtapose this with the battle waged by God and won by Christ. In the Garden of Eden rejected true freedom in search of something we imagined would be better. We traded true freedom for the constraints of sin. And like our country’s patriots of old, we found ourselves oppressed and imprisoned, but unlike them, we were on the wrong side of the battle - we became enemies of God. And in many ways our battle cry at the time might have been “Give me liberty and give me death! Give me the freedom that I imagine I want and give me separation from my creator!” But instead of engaging us in the battle we longed for, he waged his own battle - not against us but against sin itself. And four thousand years later he sent his only Son to fight or us. And fight he did. Upon the cross he became the very thing that made us his enemy and he suffered every punishment in our place. And that death, *his* death, gained for us the freedom that we didn’t understand we needed. But just like our forefathers, he too created a declaration of independence

from oppression. His resurrection proclaimed to all of creation, throughout all time, that his creation was freed. No longer chained, no longer subjected to the reign of evil, no longer destined for separation from God, we were free. As Christians, we know of this victory that was won by the blood of Christ, but we also experience an enemy that continues to fight with us, to oppress us. It continues to try and bind us from the bondage that we have been delivered from.

So does the world celebrate this freedom won by Christ? We know that Christians do, but the rest of the world rejects this victory. It complains about this freedom. It responds by waging its own battle in a quest to acquire a false freedom, a freedom defined by itself - one that ultimately will do nothing but bind them back to the chains of sin and damnation. But even though we know this, God still sends us out into the world to spread this Gospel message to all people - even those who still reject it.

In our Gospel passage today he says:

if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.

We read a similar command in Ezekiel this morning.

2 And he said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you." 2 And as he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. 3 And he said to me, "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. 4 The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' 5 And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them.

You see. He doesn't send us out to fight. He doesn't send us out to secure any victory, for the victory has already been realized. There is no battle cry in God's message because there is no battle to be fought, there is no war to be won. Liberty has been given, and death has been overcome. He sends us to spread this message and to call the world to die to self and to be raised in Christ. Our message to the world is not "Give me liberty or give me death" but "He gave me liberty *by giving me death.*"

We are sent out into the world, not by the sword, not to claim what *could be ours* but to proclaim what is already ours. We are sent out into the world, by the command and provisions of God to read to all who will listen the real declaration of independence - the declaration that true freedom comes not by the blood of man but by the blood of Jesus. That true freedom comes not by living but by dying - dying to sin, dying to self. That true freedom comes not by individual independence but by dependence on God. By being grafted into the resurrected body of Jesus; by dying and rising with him and in him. By being fully and completely dependent upon him for true life.

This is the freedom that the church celebrates and this morning our call to action is refreshed. Go out into the world - not as soldiers but as peacemakers. There is no battle ground - only a mission field. There are no enemies still to be defeated - they have all been slain. All that remain in the field

are the blind - those who have not yet seen the work of Jesus or those who have and have shut their eyes. But we are to go into the field and proclaim the victory of Christ to both of them. "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to the nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me." We are not to judge but to proclaim. We are not to withhold the message from those who have rejected Jesus. We withhold nothing. Our message is one we share with everyone. Blind in faith or blind in stubbornness, we discern not. Our message is not one of division but of unity. It is not one of hopelessness but of hope.

This morning, go out with Jesus' declaration of independence and let your cry be "He gave me liberty by giving me death!"

Please pray with me.

Dear Lord,

On this day of independence, we are reminded of the true freedom that you have won for us. Send us out into the field of this world, full of grace and full of courage to bring the Gospel message to all who will hear.

In your name. Amen.