

Sermon Proper 9 Year C 7-4-10

I'm going to do something I rarely if ever do in a sermon; I'm going to depart from the readings given us today. Since it is the fourth of July I thought it would be a good time to consider the topic of Freedom.

People generally use the word *freedom* in order to describe two things: the first is simply lack of subjection to any kind of ownership or tyrannical authority, and secondly, the lack of restriction of one's actions, the absence of obstacles to self-determination or personal choices, the right to make up one's own mind with regard to occupation, speech, assembly, religion and so on.

Naturally, this kind of freedom is entirely desirable and, in many ways, our nation came into being out of a deeply felt need for this. Although throughout the course of our history we have not always been able to achieve perfect freedom in the sense just described, it is none the less true that few would question the desirability for such freedom. Men and women are still willing to make enormous sacrifices - their very lives at times - for this ideal of freedom.

Yet, freedom in the Christian meaning differs from the individual "do as I want" sense of freedom that dominates contemporary secular discourse. To be truly free in a Christian sense is to act in accord with our nature as God intended it...in accord with our human nature. We can turn to our catechism for a brief yet informative understanding of our human nature and freedom. I invite you to turn to page 845 in the Book of Common Prayer.

What are we by nature?

We are part of God's creation, made in the image of God.

What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

It means that we are free to make choices: to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God.

Why then do we live apart from God and out of harmony with creation?

From the beginning, human beings have misused their freedom and made wrong choices.

Why do we not use our freedom as we should?

Because we rebel against God, and we put ourselves in the place of God.

Now I'd like to take each one of these ideas and open them up even further.

1. We are part of God's creation, made in the image of God.

To say we are part of creation sets us in a context. We are in relation to all that already exists. In the story of the first chapter of Genesis, God first creates light; God creates the sky and separates the land from the water.

Then God creates plants; the stars and the moon; birds and creatures in the sea; every living creature; then finally humankind. God says, *Let us make mankind in our image according to our likeness*. I go through this to remind us that we are set within a created world and are the last beings created.

And we are created in the *imago Dei*....the image of God.

2. What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

It means that we are free to make choices: to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God.

As Christians we believe that it is through Christ that we have the ability to use our freedom correctly and in accordance with how God's very self acts in freedom. It is in Christ, as perfect Man, that man comes to the full realization of what it means to be in the image and likeness of God. For man's freedom is an Icon, an image of the Divine Freedom itself.

3. From the beginning, human beings have misused their freedom and made wrong choices.

In chapter 3 of Genesis we see how human beings made wrong choices and violate God's intention of how we are to use our freedom. Adam and Eve violate God's will, Cane kills Able and the fall of humanity is upon us. But there is a remedy in the person of Christ who justifies us before God and reconciles us back to God. Christ teaches us that we are to use our freedom to submit our wills to God's will. As we pray each week in the Lord's Prayer... "thy will be done."

In each Christian's response to God, in saying, "let Thy will," he identifies himself with the God-Man Christ, and in this way, the Divine Will, freedom comes as an expression of one's own will. The will of God, His work, His freedom have become one's own. *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me,"* says St. Paul in Galatians.

4. Because we rebel against God, and we put ourselves in the place of God.

Throughout history we see how people commit the sin of idolatry by placing themselves in the place of God. In every day ways we fail to use our freedom as God intends by losing perspective of who we are and who God is...we violate the image of God within us...that divine spark that resides in each of us and calls the best out of us.

How do we break this cycle and use our freedom in ways that honor the imago Dei within each of us? Our passage from Galatians this morning may give us part of the solution. *“So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So, then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.”* Here Paul reminds us that seeking the good of others is the appropriate way to use our freedom and honor the imago Dei within us.

Our bishop Ian Douglas says that one of the problems within our culture and in the Anglican Communion today is what he calls, “the Tyranny of Consensus”....that somehow we are to be in complete agreement on everything....and if we cannot agree then something is wrong. My mentor Senator Moss used to say, “Where there is no controversy there is no progress. Whether for the individual or for the nation, self is best served by transcending self.”

Forcing agreement on everything is contrary to the way we are made as unique and infinitely diverse people set in an infinitely diverse creation. But we are all called to work for the good of all and be willing to put aside our own desires for the wellbeing of others. This may mean good old fashioned sacrifice, or simply using judgment when to speak or when to be silent.

Celebrating our freedom is to recognize it's not only about doing what I want to do, but more importantly it is to make choices that benefits others and honor the image of God that resides in you and in me. This is true freedom.

In a Christian context humanity's freedom is an Icon, an image of Divine Freedom itself. Amen.