

Pentecost 5 – July 5, 2020

Text: Matt 11:25-30

Theme: Enslavement to Christ = True Freedom

Freedom is a misunderstood and misapplied word. Many people believe freedom is the ability to do and say anything they want to do and say. We hear all about their rights to do and say it without regard to anyone else. How many times have you heard someone say, “This is America, I can say whatever I want?” Or how often is the 1st Amendment invoked as though the 1st Amendment gives you authority to lie, cheat and deceive if you are so inclined? That is not at all what the 1st Amendment says. It says:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.” It says nothing of what is good and proper. It just says that Congress cannot decide what is good and proper for us. Freedom is not the license to impose whatever your group thinks is best for others. Freedom, politically speaking, is a society being able to democratically determine their own parameters of good, within the bounds of the Constitution, without governmental authorities interfering.

Jesus defines freedom in a theological way in our Gospel for today. Strangely enough, true freedom, for Jesus, is gained not by independence, but by taking a yoke of slavery upon oneself, but not just any yoke; his

yoke. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

People have struggled with the Bible forever because nowhere does it condemn slavery. Of course it doesn't. Slavery is one of the foundations of Christianity. When faith was created in you, you were made a slave to Christ. The only difference between slavery to Christ and slavery as a human institution is that you can always decide when you no longer wish to be a slave of Christ. In our Gospel, he encourages us to remain his slave because that is where we find true rest. And, in fact, to leave our enslavement to Christ is only to sell ourselves into some other type of slavery that has no rest.

Remember, rest is not napping. Rest is relaxing in God's arms. Do you remember a time in your life when you felt completely safe and completely secure? Perhaps it was while sitting in the lap of a parent or grandparent when you were a small child. You felt as though you were protected from every evil in the world. That's rest. As an adult, the only way we get that kind of rest is by sitting in Jesus' lap which is what we do when we gladly receive his yoke upon us. We leave the worry to him. He's our master. We leave the plan to him. He's our master. We look to him for guidance and empowerment. He's our master. We do not want some kind of fake freedom that looks free but leaves us on the hook with all of the responsibility when

things go south – and things will always go south sooner or later in a sin-fallen world. We want real freedom, simple freedom, in which Jesus takes all the burden off of us and places it squarely upon himself. That is what he did on the cross.

It was on the cross that Jesus freed us. He paid for all our sin so that we are not bound by any human system. We serve only him, for he is our Lord and our master and to be his slave is the only true freedom there is in this life. That freedom guides and directs us in all other matters. A person enslaved to Jesus speaks truth that uplifts people and empowers people. To denigrate and demean is to be enslaved to the world. A person enslaved to Jesus needs no promise from the government to allow free speech because we have the Great Commission that supersedes any human law, and if we are jailed for proclaiming Jesus, praise Jesus, we're glorifying God! We just get to proclaim him to a new audience. The bottom line is that if you understand the freedom afforded to you by having Jesus' yoke upon you, you understand real freedom such as no human governmental system can ever duplicate.

These are times when we are faced with complex questions about slavery and freedom. As we examine human history, we regularly forget two things. First, everyone is a slave in this life. The only question is to whom or what are you enslaved? If you are enslaved to Jesus, nothing and no one else can master you. Second, slavery never works when human beings are the masters, whether those human beings are Native American

Chieftains, American plantation owners or your modern day corporate CEOs. Human beings are incapable of being godly masters. Sooner or later, they take advantage of their slaves and use them to better their own situation. Jesus is the only being to whom we allow ourselves to be enslaved, because he is the Good Shepherd. So while it is good to learn from the sins people have committed in the past so that we avoid repeating them, we don't dwell in the past. Focus on the now. How do we, slaves of Christ today, fulfill our mission by sharing his love with all people right now?

Finally, remember to rest. God is in control and we are only small cogs in the wheel. The world is always trying to place burdens upon us that are not ours to carry. You are responsible to stop the spread of viruses! You are not responsible for the injustices committed against black people, Irish people, Native American people, Polish people, Asian people or any other people 50-500 years ago! Satan wants you accept responsibility for every evil in this world and there is no forgiveness! No true. Jesus says we can fail and fail and fail again and he will give us the opportunity to be forgiven, turn around and head down the right path. Satan hates that.

Leave everything to Jesus, your master. You just focus on worshipping him and glorifying him and enjoy the rest he gives you in his Word and Holy Baptism and in his very body and blood. Spend some time today or this week, just sitting quietly in his lap. It is his simple gift to us and simple gifts are the best gifts.