



SAFE HARBOR

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The Freedom Easter Brings

Easter is a beloved time of celebration and hope. In the many sermons, cantatas, plays and other festivities we all rejoice in the Resurrection of Jesus from the grave. In the early Church, Sunday worship was to be a remembrance of Easter and signifies the new Creation at the start of the week. As part of this new Creation Christians are to experience a new birth of the Spirit whereby we enter into the freedom to fellowship with God as did Adam and Eve before their sin caused separation. For this reason we need to look at the freedom that Easter brings.

The first freedom is the freedom to find faith fulfilled. The Risen Christ shows the realization of faith. He trusted in God and God did not leave him in the tomb. Rather Easter brings about the fulfillment of faith. For how long had faith been tied up in rituals, sacrifices, outward appearances of allegiance to God never seen or heard from? Indeed Adam's sin chained humankind to the things of this world, tainted and imperfect. In Christ a new realm opens, one in which our Spirits are free to meet God without shame and fear. Thus we are able to go beyond the religions of man and into the Kingdom of Heaven. When Mary sees the Risen Lord and rushes to Him, she is told not to cling to Him but to go and tell the good news to the disciples. In sense she is to release the physical and honor the Risen Lord as the True Giver of life.

The second freedom is the freedom to love without reservation. Jesus said that it is easy to love someone who loves you but the true child of God is free to love those who are unlovely, who espouse hatred, the diseased, the poor and the enemy. It is difficult to imagine this freedom in our lives and in our churches without the freedom Easter brings. How often do we greet in love the unlovely who enter into our congregations?

In my first ministry as an associate pastor, I was given the task of dealing with the bus ministry which ran through the poor part of town. There were those that saw this as a violation of the sanctity of their little church world because these children were often unruly and into trouble. Others saw this their response to proving how much they cared for the less fortunate. The real problem was that no one viewed this as reaching out to the "little children" that Jesus called to his knee. In trying to reach these my prayer was to show the respect for these persons as well as

hopefully extending the ministry of the church into the community. Thus we could bring the freedom of the Gospel to these ones who might not have any conception of love.

Thirdly is the freedom from sin. It is true that as humans we are still under the curse of what is called original sin. The news of the Resurrection is that we might live free from sin. Paul writes in Romans that even though he was torn by sinful tendencies, he was able, through the Resurrection to be set free by the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Therefore those who surrender themselves to the Risen Lord might live according to the Spirit.

John Wesley defined sin, “properly so called” a known violation of a known law of God. To live above sin requires the presence of the Holy Spirit who cleanses and frees from the world of sin. To be sure Wesley also defined sin, “not properly so called” as any violation of a law of God. While we might not be entirely free from “sin” we are freed from the condemnation that these sins bring. We may live, then, in accordance and harmony with the Law of the Spirit.

Finally we need to remember that where the Spirit is we may worship God in freedom and in truth. For the Spirit brings release from the old strictures of religion, allowing us to truly know the truth of God as our Creator and Sustainer. For where the Spirit of the Lord is there is peace and rest for our souls. We find the surety of our salvation in Easter. By His Resurrection Jesus has removed the sting of death and the path to the new Heaven and Earth. Through Easter we need not try to find the “yellow brick road” to God’s Kingdom for he brings us within as we placed our faith in Him.

In the end, freedom of religion is not a right guaranteed by a government. It is a freedom of the heart that might be exercised because of Easter. Every person longs to restore their relationship with their Creator. Religion tends to bind one to rituals, rules, precepts that are chains to the world. True religion is from the heart and in Easter we find the last chain broken, the chain of death and in breaking this chain those in Christ are made alive.

Reflections

The Peace Prayer of St. Francis

by an anonymous Norman c. 1915 A.D. Peace Prayer

Lord make me an instrument of your peace

Where there is hatred,
Let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is error, truth;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, Joy.

O Divine Master grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled
As to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

This poem reflects the life of freedom that is found in those whose lives are given to following the Risen Lord. It is a call to a faith as well as life.

Words of Encouragement

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!

Job 19:25-27 (ESV)