

"Independence / Freedom"

Romans 7:15-25a

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

July 3, 2005

Well, it's been a soggy week in 'Lake Bottineau'. 'Lake Woebegone' would have been a good little name but it was already taken. The good news is that we will not have to worry about not having enough deep 'ground moisture' for a while. They say nearly 20 inches of June rainfall in the Souris area - we had much less out around our farm [something like 17 inches] and only a mere 9 ½ inches since last Sunday. There was one point mid week when the rain was falling so gently I found myself thinking about how wonderfully refreshing and nourishing such a rain could have been in many of those times when we have longed for just such a rain shower. But in those moments I just wanted to curse every drop [although my piety would not allow any such expression] because I was absolutely convinced that by that time, every drop of rain that fell from the heaven and reached the ground it had been given direction and an invitation to the party that they were throwing in my basement. But then I have learned that many of you have been hosting just such a gathering of precious raindrops in you basements as well. And those who have rejected the notion of such an indoor gathering on such a nice holiday weekend have chosen to congregate in many of the low lying camp grounds throughout the area. — Yep, the deep ground moisture is sufficient and we can all pass on our thanks to God for his provision and a side note that enough is enough if it is all the same to Him.

It is not my intent to just talk about the weather this morning - as with most things, it seems that there is a good sermon in there somewhere. In fact, as we come to "Independence Day" and celebrate the freedom that we, as a nation enjoy, I find that I learned a lot about freedom and bondage this past week thanks to the rains that fell and continued to slip in to our home. I found that it was an amazing sensation to experience the weight of bondage continually pressing down as we fought unsuccessfully to keep the water under control. We absolutely could not leave - it was relentless and we could do nothing to stop the flow. As the hours of trying to fight the battle drag into days the weight of the bondage got more and more overwhelming and I thought of Paul's statement - "wretched man that I am, who will rescue me.....". Freedom is an amazing thing that is so easy to take for granted.

For those of you who have been fighting the battle against water - I sympathize with you and say 'this too will pass'. The Sun will come out and dry up the land and we will celebrate a renewed freedom. As a nation we come to this national

holiday and celebrate a freedom won even as we recognize that such freedom can always be lost. As a pastor, I find myself thinking about such word as we find in our scriptures today which talk about our bondage to sin and how heavy the weight is as sin presses against us. It is not a battle easily won and there are times in our lives when the forces and effects of sin are more relentless than ground water trying to seep into our lives and the damaging effect is more damaging than wet wood or molding sheet rock. But the promise of God is that the Son has come out. Where the burden is great we are invited to be yoked to the power of Christ. Yoked to Christ we have a rescuer and a companion in the battle against bondage to sin.

I suspect that such a statement sounds a bit religious and pious after a lengthy focus on the problem of water in the basement . But the struggle against sin and it's effects are just as pressing everyday. Perhaps we forget and take our Christian faith for granted as much as we take our national freedoms for granted. We throw a picnic for the 4th of July but don't spend a lot of time remembering how it all came about. We go to church on Sunday and sing the songs but Monday is another day - who thinks about being yoked to Christ then?

Years ago I ran into an article that truly impressed me. It was the reflections of a man named Alexander Fraser Tytler lived at the end of the eighteenth century and wrote a book entitled "The Decline and Fall of the Athenian Republic" . What Tytler found was that ancient democracies waned under the selfishness of human hearts. He wrote: **"The average age of the world's greatest civilizations has been 200 years. These nations have progressed through the following sequence:**

From bondage to spiritual faith; from spiritual faith to great courage; from courage to liberty; From liberty to abundance; from abundance to selfishness; from selfishness to complacency; from complacency to apathy; from apathy to dependency; from dependency back to bondage."

In our abundance - have we forgotten? In our complacency, have we come to the place where we just do not care? As a home owner, I want my basement dry - it is important enough to fight for it. As a nation we love our freedom and that freedom requires more than a picnic once a year. As a Christian, sin comes knocking at the door and we end up doing those very things that we hate and cry out with the Apostle Paul, "wretched man that I am, who will rescue me ?" And Jesus invites us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and I will give you rest."

As we worship and celebrate this weekend we have song some hymns that are classified as the 'National Hymns". I would like you to sing one verse of a very

familiar 'hymn' - a verse that is seldom sung when we sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" - sing with me the second verse of hymn # 688.

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These words, along with the words of many of the 'national hymns' point us to the same reality - as we reflect on the beauty and blessing of the life we know, God is a central element. When we sing of a "sweet land of liberty" we recognize that it is God who is the author of our liberty. When we sing a "Battle Hymn", we sing of God's truth and His marching forward. And when we sing of a "Star Spangled Banner", even though we often stop before verse two, we are reminded that it is "in God that we trust." Do we remember? Are we still willing to be yoked to Christ? Are we sliding the way of others nations that have moved out of bondage into spiritual freedom and liberty only to become apathetic and return to bondage?

Bondage is no fun! A minor thing like being tied to working in a flooding basement is such a minor thing compared to true bondage - still it is a taste - and I, for one am against bondage.

Celebrate well the freedom that we enjoy! And at the same time put on the yoke that our God has invite you to share with Him. Hear and respond to the call - "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

AMEN