

Pastor Bill Sass – Sermon for July 5, 2020
Palisade Bethel Lutheran Church

True Freedom
Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30
Independence Day Weekend

In his book The Grace Awakening, Chuck Swindoll tells about the movie, *The Killing Fields*. It is the true story of a reporter working in Cambodia during a time of awful bloodshed. His closest assistant was a Cambodian later captured by the Khmer Rouge; a totalitarian group known for its cruelty. What the Cambodian assistant endured while trying to find freedom is beyond belief. It isn't a movie for the squeamish. There are things his assistant sees that defy imagination. He is brutally beaten, imprisoned, and mistreated. Starving, he survives by sucking blood from a beast in the field.

He lives in the worst possible conditions. At long last, he plans his escape. He runs from one tragic scene to another. Finally, having endured the jungle while being chased by his captors, he steps out into a clearing, and looks down. To his utter amazement, he sees the Cambodian border. Down below him is a small refugee camp. His eyes catch sight of a hospital, and a flag, and on that flag, a cross. There, at long last, hope is awakened!

At that point, the music builds to a climax. Light returns to his weary face, which says in a dozen different ways, "I'm free. I'm free!" The joys and delights of his long-awaited freedom are his. Ultimately, he makes it to America, and enjoys a tearful reunion with his friend – all because he is free. Free at last!

What does it mean to be free? For some people, it means avoidance of all responsibility, elimination of all constraints – to do our own thing without any regard to others, or society at large. So, we harass the new groom, and say his freedom is over. Stressed-out parents dream of the day when the last chick has flown the nest. Taxpayers curse the IRS, and the weary homeowner dreams of retiring to a condominium with no grass to mow. Freedom, we say to ourselves, is absence of responsibility.

But deep in our hearts, we know it is all a lie. For true freedom is not the absence of responsibility. Such freedom would be hell. We only have to look about to see what freedom from responsibility has done to many people. Quickly we observe moral bankruptcy, and monumental misery.

True freedom is always yoked to responsibility. Steven Mosley, in his book There I Go Again, gives a classic example of this truth. In 1980, Peru was struggling to make its way out of twelve years of dictatorship, and toward full democracy. An engineering consultant named Hernando de Soto began to study two communities that stood on opposite banks of Lima's Rimac River.

He was interested in them because they were located quite close together, and yet were markedly different. In one, the majority of the dwellings were crude huts made of mud bricks, or cardboard and ply wood. Yet the residents were not exactly destitute. DeSoto noticed refrigerators and other modern appliances visible through most open doorways, and television antennas sprouting from almost all the shacks.

Across the river, however, in the other community, attractive three and four-story brick homes, bordered by tidy gardens and paved sidewalks, dominated the scene. Many residents were merchants who lived above thriving businesses – a pharmacy, a grocery, a tire shop, a shoe shop.

DeSoto began asking: Why do some people prosper, and others languish? So, he began talking to both residents and local authorities of these two communities. To his surprise, he discovered these two communities had almost identical beginnings. They'd been founded at the same time by Indian migrants who'd come from the same area, even the same villages. In fact, brothers were living across the river from each other.

So how to explain their vast economic differences? The usual answers wouldn't do. Both communities had the same cultural background. Both had been settled by migrants claiming squatter's rights over public lands. If foreign or local exploitation was involved, both seemed equally vulnerable to it.

Finally, DeSoto tracked down a retired Housing Ministry official who'd seen the two neighborhoods develop for decades. He told DeSoto that for six years, the elected leader of the more prosperous neighborhood had lobbied Lima's politicians until they granted land titles to the residents of that community. Once secure from eviction, home owners began to borrow, sweat, and save until they could improve their dwellings. In ten years, their homes had increased in value a phenomenal forty-one times.

Residents in the community across the river, however, remained only squatters. They were not given titles to their land. They could not add rooms, or sell property, or borrow money to set up businesses. So, logically enough, they spent their money on appliances and on pickup trucks to move everything if they were evicted. DeSoto realized that, in this case, the difference between poverty and prosperity was simply owning the ground under your feet. A dwelling had to belong to you for you to work at improving it.

True freedom is yoked to responsibility. Many people complain about being yoked to a spouse, or yoked to heavy family responsibilities, or yoked to a mortgage. If they were honest, though, they would confess that taking on that yoke of responsibility was the best thing that ever happened to them. It forced them to use their abilities to the utmost.

That's a paradox found in our lesson from the Gospels. "Take my yoke upon you," says Jesus, "and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart." A yoke is a wooden frame used to harness oxen or horses. the two animals would be bound together. They would share the load equally as they plowed the fields. Jesus knew all about yokes. He had spent many hours helping out in Joseph's carpenter shop. A good carpenter would custom-make yokes, carefully measuring the animals. The yoke had to fit perfectly. If it didn't, it would harm the animals. It could neither be too big, nor too small.

True freedom for the believer is being yoked with Christ. When the going gets rough, He is there encouraging us, sharing the load, helping us to make it through. "Take my yoke." Jesus told His followers, "for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

How can a yoke make us free? The truth is that everyone is yoked to something. People who have no responsibility often become yoked to their own sloth, of their own self-indulgent whims. People not yoked to Christ become yoked to the unhappiness of a dying world. This brings us to the second truth about freedom. **True freedom is delivery from sin.**

There is weight we are all carrying that is so heavy we cannot move it ourselves. We must have some help. This load is so heavy that your friends cannot remove it and your family cannot remove it. It is the weight and burden called sin...the Good news is there is someone whose specialty is lifting this load. His name is Jesus. He has come to lift the weight and burden of sin. It is weight you cannot lift yourself, but His specialty is lifting that burden off those who come to Him in faith. True freedom is deliverance from sin. AMEN!

“soli Deo Gloria”

