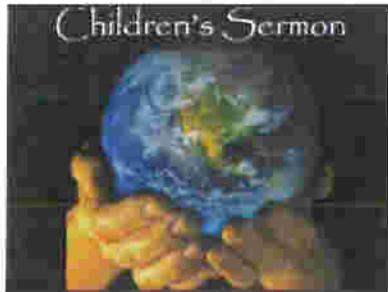


Calvary United Methodist Church  
July 5, 2009

**FREEDOM'S PRICE**  
**Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher**



Children's Sermon

*Freedom*

Isaiah 61:1 (MsgB)

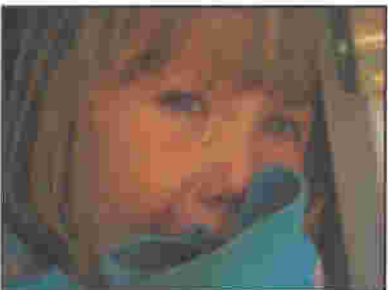
I wanted to talk about freedom to the children. God tells us that we have been given this gift of freedom and it's not just for us. It's to use to make the world a better place so I want to read this scripture to you.



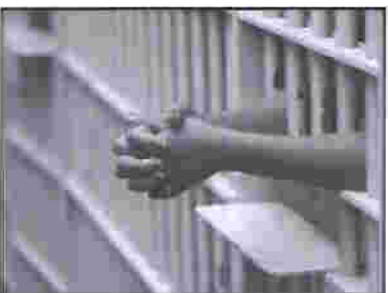
The Spirit of God, the Master, is on me because God anointed me. He sent me to preach good news to the poor, heal the heartbroken, announce freedom to all captives, pardon all prisoners.



We can't imagine what it would be like, at least most of us, to go daily through a garbage dump looking for something to eat or something to sell for our family. This is life for people in several parts of the world where for children, literally, it's a daily way of life. (Some of you saw the *Slum Dog Millionaire*.) For people in India and South America and Africa and many continents it is a daily way of life. God says we take care of the poor, those who are broken.



We don't have to go beyond our pew to find someone who is broken, do we--loss of jobs, loss of loved ones, loss of health. All kinds of losses we experience and God says we are here as comforters for one another, so we do indeed bring comfort.



He says there will be a day when we will turn those who are in prison, we will pardon them. You know what pardon is—you've been forgiven. If you've been forgiven you have been pardoned. God says the day will come when all will be pardoned and set free from the sins we have committed. We thank God for that gift of what freedom would be like.



That's what freedom looks like. It is a celebration and that's why we have it today because men and women with vision set this country on a path for freedom and what a great thing it is.



Some months ago you were told that on this particular Sunday we were going to tell you a little bit about *Straight for the Journey, Straight for Courage*, a booklet that was put together to help our troops. In 1942 Cokesbury, the Methodist Publishing House, started printing this book *Strength for Service*. It was handed out during World War II and the Korean Conflict. Just about six or seven years ago a Boy Scout doing his Eagle Project saw it in his grandfather's belongings and thought it would be great to have something like for the men and women who serve our nation today but make it contemporary. It would have pastors and leaders around the nation who they would know today who would them strength and hope in a time of need.



We advertised this—it's \$3.00 a book. We've received \$254 which purchases about 85 books. We thank you for that. If anyone still wants to give you can put it in an envelope and see that we get it.



Right outside this door we're asking for your change—and I told some folks this morning dollar bills still count as change. We are sending monthly packages to the service men and women who are deployed serving our nation right now. I think if I was deployed I would be grateful for a church that remembers me, spiritual means as well as other items that they can't always get. It's about \$12 each month when we send. If you would like to be a sponsor one time put \$12 in an envelope and mark it for our groups and place it in the offering plate some week. If you would put your change, that's in your pocket every week when you come in here into the mailbox out here each week it will be available for many of the mission mailings we do for mission care. We just thank you and praise God for your generosity that helps us serve other people.



Message

Galatians 5:13-14 (MsgB)

I had mentioned earlier that through scripture today the Apostle Paul is telling us why we have been given the great freedom we have. I would like to read this passage for you. I would invite you to read all of Chapter 5 if you have a chance today to have a little more understanding of the idea of freedom from God's prospect—the great gift we have been given as children of the most High God.



It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don't use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that's how freedom grows. For everything we know about God's Word is summed up in a single sentence: Love others as you love yourself. That's an act of true freedom.



There has always been a price for freedom—always. If you study the history of the world men and women around the globe for thousands of years have fought for what they thought were their rights as being someone that God had created. They thought they had more rights, more freedom and so it is that they have stood up for something that they want to believe in.

Most of us have been born in this nation. We have grown used to the fact that we can say about anything we want to say. Within the limits of the law we can do about anything we want to do. We can act and react in ways as a protest against government and other things cannot be done in most places of the world. You could be put in prison; you could be executed in many parts of the world for doing things that we see as just our right, our freedom.



We talk about people being caged up like animals. If you have ever been to a zoo you may have seen bears in a six by eight place walking back and forth. I've been privileged to visit many folks in prison through the years. It is beyond my belief what it would be like to be in a six by eight cell day after day, year after year for twenty or thirty years or even for a month. We are used to going, being, doing.

God says we have more freedom than just what it means to be penned up. We have a freedom of our life and what we do with it and so it is we take advantage of what has given us and do something with it.



I suspect this weekend a lot of us didn't think about freedom as we thought about picnics and lots of good food. I think for a lot of our major holidays we forget about veterans, we forget about leaders and forbearers, mothers and fathers who went before and the price that was paid. Remember freedom has a price. We forget the price that was paid and we don't often journey around and look at the cemeteries and the amount of flags that are out there recognizing those who have given their lives in service. That's a part of that scripture we read—to serve others. We forget what it would be like. Instead we have parties which are a great thing. When this first Declaration of Independence was signed, the leaders at the time said that everyone basically should shoot guns and they should show ways of celebrating what was being accomplished across the nation. What a great thing it was to do to celebrate in that way.



I have in my mind that those who gathered in that great assembly a long time ago have no idea we have pushed our own freedoms. I am sure the Heavenly Father looks down and says to us, you have been given freedoms but do not abuse them. Do not abuse the freedoms you have. They are given to you for life and they are given to you that you may enhance life around you; not just that we can do what we think we ought to do like eat, drink and be merry. That's not why we were given freedoms.



If I were to ask you what is your symbol of freedom today in this great land some might chose the flag and some might chose this symbol (Statue of Liberty). It was given to this nation years ago because it welcomes those who are weary, those who are oppressed that they might come to this land and enjoy of all things opportunity. Opportunity that you can't have in some societies where you could be educated, you could have all kinds of knowledge, but you can't do anything with it because you were imprisoned. You were oppressed by a government that will not allow you to use your expressions. So perhaps it isn't either one of those things.

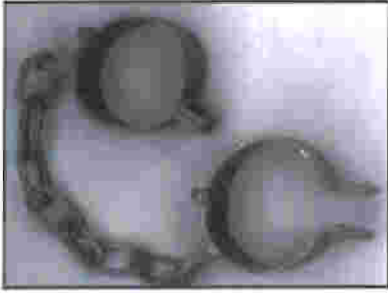
If I were to ask you what body of people are the most free, we again might think it is America but it's really a group of people called Christians. You can be free in any society of the world as a Christian, maybe not to express all the things you want, but free from the burdens that we carry as an individual inside us when we are in relationship with God.

All of us have certain things that keep us bound up. Some of those things are called sins. They are the things we say and then we regret it and so we hurt someone. We wish we could make relationships right and sometimes people don't like to make things right. We're not willing to say those words "I forgive you" so it brings tension within our lives. Sometimes there are all kinds of little demons in our lives, the addictive behaviors. Things that make our personality less than it ought to be and certainly pleasing to God ourselves. So we have burdens and things that ride on our back. It's like a yoke, it's heavy on us.



We are not free until we can come to God and know that it's a free gift. God says to us that our freedom, freedom from all those worries, all those concerns, all those burdens a price was paid by the Lord Jesus Christ that you and I might be free. We might be free to be the people God chose us to be: to be a loving, to be a caring, to be a unifying body of people who want to bring peace, not just in America but peace around the world. I think we have been given a gift that we don't have any idea how precious it really is.

On several of my travels I have been to Senegal and Ghana where the slave trade began. In Senegal it started in the 1400's with slave ships coming from the Dutch. There were cabins half the size of this room, or maybe less than half the size, filled with four or five hundred women or men. Many, up to two-thirds of them, would die before they even got to America. They were shackled. Now you've seen things on TV of people shackled before they went into courtrooms. The folks would be shackled laying flat in ships and shackled in America. I have seen witnesses in places in Africa where even today people are shackled to trees. They do not have a prison system like our prison system.



We don't have these shackles on us that look like this but I'm going to tell you there are many people sitting in pews that are shackled, that are enslaved. We are enslaved by the things of this world that don't allow us to be free because we have not yet turned them over to God. Things like the worry that we carry. The worry over the things that we cannot change versus turning to God and saying, Lord will you set me free from this, enable me to do what I can do and enable me to quite worrying about those things I can't change on my own. We need to be able to be set free and trust God with a lot more of the things within our lives.



One of the things that we heard from the Apostle Paul said "You are set free. For the prices of freedom do not basically, do not misuse it." Do not misuse your freedom. When we have what we have in this country and those before us have come through that great gate, through the Statue of Liberty and through that island, Ellis Island, and have signed those registers and wanted what they could have in this free nation. It was more than just eat, drink and be merry and have a party. It was a life that would be responsible. Not just responsible to provide food for the table and provide for your family and housing, it was a life that was responsible before Almighty God.



We have been given, not that we might just have a great life, much that we might serve God and others. Remember that in that scripture from Galatians: You have your freedom that you might serve. What would it mean for us to serve others today? Some people say how can you talk about freedoms and serving others when we've been given this long list of commandments. Some people would look at the Christian life and see it as just a list of rules; you can't do this and you can't do that. But when Paul was speaking to the group of Galatians he was saying basically that no longer are we bound just to this law but Christ has set us free from the law and given us just one major law; love your neighbor as yourself and love God Almighty.

If we do that all the others that come in those laws would fall into place. I'm not sure about you when you think about what it is to love your neighbor, but if think of the first part, loving yourself. I know when I'm hungry I take care of myself. I get something to eat.

I know when I'm tired, I seek rest. I know when I'm lonely, I see another friend. I know if I'm hurting, I see help. You understand what I'm saying? If we truly know what it means to take care of self that should give us some vision of what it means to take care of a neighbor. When we see the lonely in our midst, when we see the hurting, when we see the hungry, when we see the tired, the weary, the broken, the imprisoned, that is a glimpse from God to us to say you have been given your freedom not for you and you alone. It is given not to misuse. You have been given it as a gift from God that you might give new life to others.



I am very well pleased that God allowed me to be born in Central Pennsylvania. I made no decision to make that happen. I am also very pleased that God gave me the grace that I was born in North America in a place called the United States. My suspicion is that less than one percent of you here made that decision. Unless there is someone here that was born in another nation, you were born into families who several generations ago immigrated here. It's by God's grace; it was nothing on your own doing.



Do you realize if you were in any one of those other continents today your life would not be the same, including even in Europe. If you were in Red Square this morning you wouldn't be hearing this thought. You wouldn't have the freedom to talk out against the government and to speak out and to write. If you were born in most of Africa you would be living in extreme poverty. If you were born in a place like Venezuela and had Chavez as your leader where twenty-three percent of those who were educated in the last two years have exited that nation because they are not allowed to use their education and because of the extreme government.



You have been placed here and I hope you give thanks to God for that. It is here that you can live out your freedom. God says since I have entrusted you with this freedom what will you do with it. The word in Scripture says we ought to serve. We, you and I, have a privilege to make a difference in this world of ours. To touch other lives in ways that no one can. You alone might have the opportunity to see a neighbor in need that another neighbor will ever see. God invites us to take our skills, our abilities, our time and our talents to



serve and so it is we should do this.

Love thy neighbor. I don't know where that ends because I have mentioned before that all of us have had neighbors at times that are very difficult to deal with. But God says to us: sometimes you haven't been so easy to deal with. Have you ever had those days when God has looked down at you and God is saying, what in the world are my children thinking? Why would they say that? Why would they do that? Why would they act in this way?

God gives us the opportunity to love those who are difficult. Scripture tells us its petty easy to love people who are nice and who are like us, isn't it? It takes a lot more of us to make a conscious decision to love and to serve difficult people. God calls us to be the bigger person. God will express my love because God has first expressed God's love to me. It is indeed a very big call.



When I look at pictures for the Revolutionary War I think, gee, they were kind of silly. Everyone could hear the drums as they were coming. That wasn't a very good war strategy, was it? When these people went off they had a plan. They had a plan that it didn't matter what it would take they were going to stay here in these few colonies at that time (thirteen) and they were going to stand against the leader in London. They were going to say: we want free from tyranny, from the high taxes, from the oppression, from all those things that they were not allowed to do even though they were not in that land over in England. They took the stroll.

From that day on and even before them there have been men and women in this nation who have taken a stand and said we are not backing down until things change. Rights. Rights for all of God's children and that is what God continues to do today as we work for freedom.



Of all the things that give us power, God said I will send to you my Holy Spirit, the comforter. The Holy Spirit that you might know what to do and when to do it. There is only way to receive the power of God and that is to ask for it. Your parents wanted to give you many gifts but if they don't know what you want it's a little hard

to give to them. So we pray to Almighty God and say, Lord, would you send your Spirit upon me? Would you empower me that I can hear your voice and know your discernment, your decision for my life?

God has things for you to do that no one else on this earth will ever do but God is waiting for you to ask for that. And when we receive that gift it's not just that gift of peace which comes into our life, which is an absolutely wonderful gift, it's a gift of power. Power to do what you never thought you could do. I have had people stand and give a witness who said before I experienced this I would never be able to stand before a group of people and talk about God. By living through a mission and by inviting God into their life anew God has given them power to tell other people about God and the goodness of God in their life.

If we want that peace that passes understanding it's a free gift but we must ask God. We must invite God into our life that we can have that gift.



When I see these photographs or sketches of what Jesus might have looked like I always love the ones with a variety of children. I love some of the newer photographs that don't show a somber Jesus. They show Jesus with a smile.

I believe the power of God changes our very being. Sometimes we have so many burdens in our life that we become grouchy. Have you ever met anyone like that? They are rough and gruff, mean and nasty. You go up to someone and you turn in a bill and they are angry with you. You think gee I just offered them money for my bill. I didn't know they were mad and having a bad day. The Spirit of God enables us to become gentle people, gentle giants. We don't have to be one of those soft milquetoast kinds of people but it means that we get rid of the anger and the hatred and the meanness within us. It enables us to be the kind of person so when people would see us it would be like seeing a servant of God. They would say, here's person I can talk to, I can trust, I can believe in because they have the Spirit of God dwelling within them. When we have invited God, when we've given up our power, our control of our worries and the

troubles and the problems in life, we have the presence of God that gives us the peace that passes all understanding.

The world around us is looking for a person like Jesus, a person that would listen to them, a person who would offer them life. There is no way Jesus would set out to harm anyone. He would tell the truth and you know sometimes the truth hurts. He told the woman, go and do this no more. He told the Disciples, go and do that who do you think you are sitting at the right and the left hand of the table? Do you think you are someone great? He told people things they didn't want to hear but he didn't do it with meanness in his heart and there is a world of difference. If we love someone and we are trying to put their feet on a path that truly leads to freedom and we get that kind of freedom going in this congregation, in our community and in our personal lives, we will see a new kind of life in this nation that is free.

This nation has changed a lot in recent years and I don't know that it's all for the best because we have used some of our freedom for things that are not Godly, for immoral behavior, for promoting things through the news and television and lifestyles as if because we are free we can do anything we want. God didn't give us free life to just lead a party life. He gave us a free life that we might be responsible citizens of both this kingdom and the next. The way for us to find that life is through prayer. When we confess to God as we do here every Sunday, and I pray you do it daily, and some to God and say God I'm not yet the person who I desire to be please me anew with your Spirit and enable me to go forth in your name. God as a happy parent sends us out into our daily workplace, into our family life with our spouses and our children and our partners, whoever they are, and says I will be with you today. I will empower you. I will increase in your life that you might have peace and in having peace you will have freedom.

God gives us a great gift in freedom. That freedom is a gift that we may use it to serve all of his children. I pray this Independence Day weekend you will find your freedom in Jesus Christ.

