

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Holy Trinity Sunday

May 30, 2021 (Memorial Day weekend)

Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz

Memorial to freedom

—Romans 8:14-17

“Freedom is not free.” You’ve heard that statement. You’ve been reminded that freedom always comes at great cost. But have you ever stopped to ponder and reflect just why that is? Why isn’t freedom free? Why shouldn’t human beings be free by default, able to seek life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? We should be! Freedom should be free! But it’s not. So why is freedom so costly?

We don’t have to look far to find the answer. Freedom is not free because there are always forces that are determined to take freedom away from us. Those forces want to rob us of our freedom and replace it with tyranny and oppression. They want to take away life and deliver death in its place. We are constantly facing enemies who do not want to allow other human beings to live in peace and freedom.

There are people who want to take the lives of unborn children. Imagine that! What greater destroyer of freedom could there be than to destroy the life of another human being; murder is the ultimate destroyer of freedom. When someone’s life is taken from them it brings an end to their life and an end to everything they might have ever been. It ends their time of grace and propels them into eternity. There is no greater destroyer of liberty than to take someone’s life, and abortion takes life and liberty from the most vulnerable and helpless—the unborn.

Freedom is not free because there are forces that are constantly working to oppress you and rob you of your liberty. They want to silence you through threats and coercion and prevent you from saying things they don’t want to hear. They don’t want you to speak out in the name of Jesus; they want to silence the gospel. But these days it’s not just your Christian testimony they want to silence; if you say something that disagrees with anything they believe they want to silence you. If you want to retain your freedom to speak it will be costly; you will have to fight to hold onto that freedom. Freedom is not free because there are forces that want to steal from you what you have rightfully earned. They want to rob you, steal from you, and take your livelihood. It’s always been this way throughout human history: the “haves” exploit the “have-nots.” The “have-nots” steal and inflict violence against the “haves.” There is class envy, mistrust and hatred of people of different races, cultures and creeds. Achieving liberty and justice—holding onto freedom—is a constant fight to overcome forces of inequality and oppression.

Freedom is not free because there are enemies outside our borders who want to oppress you and me and deprive us of our freedom. I’m not a xenophobe (I appreciate and admire different nations and different cultures), but I am a realist. In the past century our nation fought two great World Wars that reminded the world of the high cost of freedom. Our enemies at the time wanted to seize America in the grip of tyranny and oppression, and the price for freedom was enormous. It was measured in the number of lives that were given to ensure that enemies on foreign shores would not be able to rob us of our freedom.

This Memorial Day we remember that freedom is not free. Freedom is not free! In this great land we are blessed to have a Constitution that defines our freedoms, but that Constitution is a piece of paper that must be defended with blood and life and treasure. If we stop doing that, then the principles that are enshrined in the Constitution will be overturned by the forces of tyranny and oppression. That is the history of the human race. It is the history of man’s inhumanity against man, man’s oppression of his fellow man, man’s tyranny over his fellow man. Remember the sacrifices that have kept you free! Freedom is not free! Never forget the price of your freedom!

Personal civic freedom is a great blessing, but it’s not the *sine qua non* of our human existence; it’s not the final word. Living in a free nation is a great blessing, but this nation called the United States of America is not where our true citizenship lies. Of infinitely greater importance is living free in Jesus because God’s Son has set us free.

There too, spiritual freedom, freedom in our relationship with God, freedom to be children of God—that freedom is not free. It’s not free because there are forces of evil that want to oppress and tyrannize us. But spiritual oppression doesn’t just come from the outside, from enemies foreign and domestic. All too frequently those forces are unseen and right within us. In addition to our ancient enemy Satan, who tempts us to destroy us, you and I also have a sinful nature that lurks inside of us that is constantly trying to enslave us. The enemies of our soul tyrannize you and me in the most tempting and seductive of ways: they try to enslave you by promising you freedom. Reflect on that irony for a moment: They want to enslave you by promising you freedom. Your spiritual enemies within and without tell you to break free from the shackles of morality and decency, to do whatever feels good, and they enslave you to passions and lusts and evil desires. Instead of living free in the moment, and freely enjoying and celebrating the gifts God has given us, we look with envy at others around us. We’re driven by selfish desire for things that are advertised to us. We become enslaved to greed and materialism. We become enslaved to bitterness and resentment. Our enemies tempt us to sin, and we become slaves to our sin. When we think of slavery to sin, we might easily think of being addicted to some vice, and we might even be tempted to look

on them with contempt: that person is an alcoholic; that person is a drug addict. Those are the people who are enslaved, right? No, search your own heart, because we can just as easily be enslaved to pride or to gluttony or to lust or to fear. Any sin will enslave us and hold us in bondage under its tyranny and oppression.

Freedom is not free. Jesus himself said, "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:34,36). The price of our freedom is the blood of Jesus shed on the cross, his holy life laid down as the payment for our sins, his innocent death that was the ransom payment that set us free. Jesus did for us what you and I could never do for ourselves. You can try to live a good life and be a good person and keep the commandments, but you cannot succeed. You cannot attain the measure of holiness and perfection you need to stand in the presence of God. You and I could never set ourselves free from our sins. So Jesus set you free. Your Savior loves you, and in love he gave himself for you, so that you could belong to him, so that he could be your Lord and Savior, so that you could live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness. For he is risen from the dead and he lives and reigns for all eternity!

Freedom is not free. Jesus has set you and me free from the curse and condemnation of our sins, but those enemies of our soul are still after us and still trying to rob you and me of our freedom. The battle to remain free is relentless. It's hard. You can't fight the battle alone. Our only hope is the Holy Spirit whom Jesus gives us, the Spirit of Truth who lives in us, the Comforter who guides us and keeps us from falling into temptation and sin. It's the Holy Spirit who enables us to live out the fulness of freedom in Christ! *Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

What is the ultimate freedom? Isn't the ultimate freedom being a slave to Jesus Christ? Being a slave of Jesus is to live in the ultimate freedom of forgiveness and hope and everlasting life. We are driven by nothing other than his love for us that prompts us to love him in return. "Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died. And he died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised to life again" (2 Corinthians 5:14,15). As servants of Jesus Christ we are not enslaved to sinful passions and evil desires; our sinful nature has been crucified with Christ. As servants of Jesus Christ we are not slaves to fear. We have no fear of condemnation, because there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1). We are not enslaved to other people's opinions and attitudes. We don't care if people judge us for belonging to Christ or criticize us for loving Jesus. The Holy Spirit sets us free from all that and enables us to live out the calling which God has given us in his Son.

Freedom is not free. That's true for the civic freedoms you enjoy as a citizen of this nation, and it's true for the spiritual freedoms you enjoy in Christ. This Memorial Day weekend, before you sit down with people you love to eat the burgers you flipped on the grill, give thanks for the freedom you enjoy. Never forget the price of your freedom! Your freedom as an American was purchased for you with the blood of the many who gave their lives that you might live free. Your freedom as a servant of the Most High God was purchased for you with the blood of the one who gave his life for you on the cross that you might live free in Jesus. Celebrate your freedom! You are free to live in the fulness of God's love. You are free to cherish the completeness of your forgiveness. Live free in Jesus! Amen.