

July 4, 2019

Dear friends in Christ,

Happy Independence Day! Today is the day that we celebrate the freedom we have as a nation—freedom from the control or dominance of another nation or ruler or governance. It is the celebration of the autonomy we have as nation. We are an independent, self-standing country with its own set of laws, its own governing body, its own system of freedom and liberties we enjoy as citizens of the United States of America. We live, as our national anthem declares, in the land of the free and the home of the brave. We cherish our freedom.

The appointed epistle reading for this past Sunday dealt with freedom, but a freedom far greater than the civil freedom we enjoy in our land. The apostle Paul was writing about the freedom we have in Christ. It is the freedom we have which delivers us from the yoke of slavery to sin. We have been emancipated from the cruel master of our sinful nature, from the curse of death and damnation to the freedom to live peacefully and joyfully in God's kingdom now and for eternity!

Typically, we view freedom as the ability to do whatever we desire. That is not the case. Freedom comes with responsibility—both in the civil realm and in the kingdom of God. Paul wrote, "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13, esv). Being freed from our sinful nature, which is only concerned about the self's well-being and interests, we are liberated in order to live as God has created us to live in loving and caring for others as much as we do ourselves.

The unalienable rights that our nation's Declaration of Independence identify—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—are often viewed as those things that the individual is entitled to for his or her own welfare. The freedom that Christ brings through His death and resurrection frees us up from selfish concern to freely love as we are otherwise unable to love. As Christ has loved us, we are enabled and empowered to love others, seeking their good as well as our own, forgiving others who have wronged us as freely as our heavenly Father has forgiven us in Christ, sharing the message of salvation—which is true freedom—with others so they may share in the joy we have.

On this Independence Day, let us give thanks to God for the blessings He has bestowed upon our nation and for the liberties we enjoy—especially the liberty we have to worship freely the God who makes Himself known in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Let us also rejoice in the freedom we have through the cross of Jesus which allows us to live in and live out the "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23a, esv) which we graciously given through the working of the Holy Spirit.

In Christ,

Pastor O.

Gracious God, we thank You for the goodness with which You have blessed our nation. We thank You more for the freedom that is ours through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Strengthen and guide us by your Holy Spirit to live in that freedom bearing the fruits that you plant within us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.