

## “The Key to Freedom”- John 8:31-36

In our post 9/11 world the word freedom has taken on a more powerful meaning than ever before. Every time you have to take your shoes off, belt off, and take out your change at airport security checkpoint, think of the word freedom. Our son David and many others fought in Afghanistan and Iraq to bring about freedom for those living in those countries. We have refugees from Syria trying to gain freedom elsewhere from tyrannical governments and ISIS. When I lived in Tidewater around Oceana Naval Air Station and saw and heard the F-18s I knew as the bumper sticker said, “Jet noise: The sound of freedom”.

Most people are on a quest of all kinds of freedom. For some it is financial freedom: paying off those credit cards and car loans. For some it is economic freedom: the freedom from unemployment or under employment. For some it is the freedom to live where they want and do and be what they want to be and not live in fear. For some it is personal freedom: the freedom to say what they think and do what they want to. They say or do regardless of who criticize them. The freedom to speak one’s mind that Donald Trump seems to be talking about. Some people need to be free from substance abuse or spousal abuse. There are all kinds of freedom that people want to be freed from. People who are in any kind of bondage feel unfree, unfulfilled, and frustrated. We see this everywhere.

Freedom is also a great Christian word. It is the next reason why I am a Christian. If you were with us before the Blizzard of 2016 I started a series entitled, “Why I am a Christian”. I am a Christian because God hounds me until I respond to his love and grace. I am a Christian because of the uncompromising teachings of Jesus and for his deep compassion and love of Jesus. I am a Christian because of the cross that symbol we use to set us apart from other faiths. The cross reminds us that Jesus died for each and every one of us instead of us having to pay the price. This morning I want to share with you another reason why I am a Christian and that is living the Christian life is living a life of true freedom.

In our passage this morning, it was the time of one of the three great Jewish feasts: Feast of the Tabernacle. It was a feast held in the fall. Jerusalem was full of people for the feast and Jesus was teaching in the Temple among the people. Not

everyone was enamored with Jesus' teaching especially the religious leaders like the Pharisees, Scribes, and the Sadducees. They would enter into open conflict with Jesus because their way of life and religious control was threatened. In this passage that read from John we find Jesus attempting to deepen the faith of the Pharisees in an attempt to get them away from rote religion and to think deeply on their own to experience God in a fresh and new way.

In verse 32 Jesus tells his listeners especially the religious leaders that they can know what the truth is and the truth would set them free. In other words anyone who recognizes, accepts, and makes Jesus a part of their lives, they will know the freedom of truth. They will go from being slaves to what the world demands and accepts to true freedom of what God wants them to be and what they can be. They can go from misunderstandings and misinformation about God to a life of certainty and truth. This is liberty. This is being set free.

What is the true freedom that John tells us that Jesus offers to anyone? First of all, there is the freedom from something. First of all, Jesus is offering us the freedom from guilt and the judgment of God. Many people live as if God is a wrathful vengeful parent wanting to punish us at a moment's notice. The guilt of past sins weighs heavily upon us. We are forgiven. We are only set free if we have allowed God to give us his forgiveness and you seek the forgiveness of those you have hurt, and forgive those who hurt you.

Second of all, we are freed from self-centeredness. It has been said that one of the definitions of sin is a person curved in one's self. Someone also has defined sin as "our dark little dungeon of self. Jesus rids us of that attitude because if when we accept him, invite him into our lives, he becomes the center of our lives and not we ourselves.

Third of all, we are freed from crippling fear. There are the common fears of sickness, pain, disability, unemployment, and financial disaster. There are irrational fears such as crossing one's fingers, wearing special charms, the number 13, and reading ones' horoscope. All fears can be turned over to God. We have the promise of a new heaven and a new earth. We have been set free from fear.

There is the freedom from things, that's negative and there is the freedom for or to things, that's positive. There is the freedom to be one's self as God made each of us and meant us to be. As fish are made for water and if they get out of the water they need to get their oxygen from the water. Without that water they can no longer process oxygen so they are no longer live as fish and they die. Humans are made for love: for loving God and for loving others. If they don't have that love they cease to be humans and they too die. Like water for fish humans need love to be distinctively human. Therefore to be ourselves we have to deny ourselves and give ourselves in love for God and for others.

Freedom is the opposite of what most people think. Most people think freedom is being preoccupied with self in order to be free to love God and neighbor. True freedom comes as we are prepared to lose oneself and give yourself away in love for God and to fellow human beings. We then find our true selves and we are truly then free.

Jesus once told the Pharisees that he, Jesus, can give them more freedom than they ever could imagine. I am a Christian because God has given me and he has given all of us true freedom. A freedom that is satisfying. A freedom no one can take away from us. The son has set you free, you will be free indeed. That's why I a Christian.