

I.N.I.

Matthew 11:28-30

July 5, 2020

A happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend to each and every one of you. Since we are here to worship God and celebrate our nation's Independence, I thought you might enjoy some these thoughts from an unknown author; they are titled –“Only in America”

1. Only in America can you get a pizza delivered to your house faster than an ambulance.
2. Only in America do people order double cheeseburgers with fries and a diet coke.
3. Only in America do banks leave the front doors open and then chain their pens to the counter.
4. Only in America do we buy hot dogs in packages of 10 and buns in packages of 8.
5. Only in America do we use the word politics to describe the process so well. Poli is Latin meaning “Many” and tics are blood sucking creatures. I used to think that was a little harsh but not anymore.

On this Independence Day weekend it seems to me we have a parallel between God's people in Palestine and our time today. I mention that because the Hebrews could look back to all those years of slavery in Egypt when finally Moses went to Pharaoh and said, “Let my people go”

In reply Pharaoh didn't say, “Sure, you all go free and send me a post card from the Promised Land.” No; Pharaoh and his mighty armies went after the children of Israel and even after they had safely crossed the Res Sea, children of Israel still spent a generation and a half wandering in the desert. And when they finally did enter the Promised Land; they struggled to possess it.

America celebrates July 4, 1776 as Independence Day but we really shouldn't. We should more correctly call it the Declaration of Independence Day; for by merely signing the Declaration that did not establish our independence.

King George of England e.g. did not read the Declaration and the say to Thomas Jefferson, “Nice piece of writing Tom; you all go and enjoy your UISA. Send me a post card from Colonial Williamsburg.” No! After signing that declaration it took seven years of war and struggling before our Constitution could actually be written and our freedom from England secured. Over 25,000 Americans died fighting for our freedom another 25,000 were badly wounded.

Jesus once told His disciples, “If you abide in My Word, then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”

What does it mean to you to be free? Given the current circumstances around our nation these days that’s an interesting question isn’t it? For some people it means the avoidance of all responsibility, the elimination of all constraints; to be able to do whatever one wants to do without any regard to the effect on others. Recently we have seen innocent lives taken, buildings burned, businesses destroyed, including police departments, monuments and statues defaced and toppled and the list goes on. That’s not freedom, that’s anarchy.

It is so sad to see all this happening to America, the greatest country in the world being ruined and destroyed.

On a lighter note people will sometimes harass a new groom and remind him that his freedom days are over. Stressed out parents will sometimes dream of the day when they are empty nesters so to speak. Taxpayers curse the IRS and weary homeowners will dream of retiring to a condominium with no grass to mow and upkeep. Freedom some people say is the absence of responsibility.

But in our hearts we all know that this isn’t quite right. True freedom isn’t the absence of responsibility; true freedom is yoked to responsibility. People may complain that they are yoked to their spouse, or yoked to heavy responsibilities or a mortgage etc. But if we are honest with ourselves then perhaps we would also confess that taking on that yoke of responsibility was the best thing that ever happened to us.

That’s the paradox found in our Gospel lesson this morning. Jesus said, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I AM gentle and humble in heart.”

Now first of all we need to know that a “Yoke” is a wooden frame used to harness oxen or horses together. The two animals would share the work load equally as they plowed the fields e.g. And, Jesus I’m sure knew all about yokes. He may have even helped his father; Joseph making yokes in his carpentry shop while growing up.

A good carpenter would custom make yokes very carefully to assure a comfortable fit for the animals. It couldn’t be too big or too small.

Now true freedom for believers in Jesus is being yoked with Christ. When the going gets tough Jesus is right there with us, encouraging us, sharing with load to help us to make it through. In fact our text this morning begins with His invitation to us. Jesus says to each of us, “Come to Me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.” Isn’t that awesome? And then come these words from Jesus, which are of greater interest – “Take My yoke upon you , for My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

So the question is, “How can a yoke make us free?” Well, truth be known we all are yoked to something. People who have no responsibility often become yoked to their own laziness or self-indulgent whims. People who are not by faith yoked to Christ become yoked to the misery and the unhappiness of this dying world. And by nature we all are yoked to sin.

We are born into this sinful world, we have a sinful nature about us and we are continually being tempted to sin in thought, word, and deed. St Paul wrote, that “we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God but are justified by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

On this 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend as we remember and count all our freedoms and blessings of being Americans; let us first of all remember our freedom by faith in Christ, the forgiveness of sins. True freedom is being delivered from sin, death and the devil which is all our through faith in Jesus.

Once a missionary over in Africa was fascinated by the ability of the villagers to carry heavy loads on their heads. And the people in these villages understood the importance as well as the significance of helping each other out with their loads.

Significantly there is also a weight each one of us is carrying; a weight so heavy we cannot move it by ourselves. We all need help with this particular load, family and friends cannot move for us either. Here I'm referring to the weight and the burden of our own sins.

Yet the Good News for us is that there is someone who can; someone whose specialty is lifting the load and that someone is with us here this morning. His name is Jesus. Yes, Jesus came to lift the weight and burden of your sins and mine, to lift the burden of sin from all people. When Jesus went to the cross, He paid the price for all sin and for all who believe in Him He offers us the forgiveness of our sins. Forgiveness so great the Psalmist reminds us that "as far as the east is from the west so far have our sins been removed."

This holiday weekend we give God thanks for this free land in which we live. We thank God for those dedicated people 244 years ago who made it possible for us to be free; free to even worship God. But let us also lay claim to our freedom in Jesus, for only when we are joined with Christ can we ever really say we are free. St Paul wrote, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. God bless America.

In Jesus' name

Amen