

The Cost of Independence
Luke 4:14-30
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Today is Independence Day, and it is a day of special significance to Americans everywhere. This is the day we commemorate the signing of the Declaration of Independence; in spite of some recent court rulings, it would seem that those who dedicated their lives to our freedom did so based on some significant religious principles. I found this little video tape titled, "In Their Own Words," and invite you to peek over the shoulder, if you will, at some of the writings of our founding fathers:

(show video)

The passage of scripture at the end comes from Luke 4, and is what Jesus read at the synagogue in Nazareth from the scroll of Isaiah, chapter 61. As he finished, he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

What did he say? That's a Messianic text! Something about his being anointed to preach good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight to the blind, and to release the oppressed... and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor- a Jubilee year. Amazing! Jesus is suggesting that with his arrival, there is hope and there is freedom and salvation. Imagine how our nation's founders read these words! Let freedom ring! Freedom from sin, freedom of tyranny, freedom from despair... and ultimately, freedom from the power of death itself... and it appears to be wrapped up in the person of Jesus.

What a gift that is... what might that mean to us today? Perhaps that means that you and I can resign from trying to run the cosmos, our lives and everyone else's lives... after the Lord has come, and he can do! We can crawl out from the shadow of despair, and set down the buckets of guilt we carry around with us. Good news! Sight for the blind! We can see clearly the ways things are meant to be- unless we choose not to. We can look to God, and know that all the -isms the world likes to throw our way... racism, militarism, sexism, materialism, agism... in Christ, they've been rendered ultimately weak and powerless. We've been set free from all that; that spirit is what our founding fathers picked up on, it's what Abraham Lincoln embraced in his Emancipation Proclamation, and it's what we still celebrate every Fourth of July.

But, the account of Jesus reading the scroll in Nazareth didn't stop with everybody being wowed by Jesus' reading ability, or his pulpit presence in the synagogue. Let me read to you what happened as Jesus began to teach a bit further about this remarkable freedom he'd come to proclaim: (read [Luke 4:22-30](#))

What an amazing turnaround! Everyone was speaking well of Jesus: "Isn't that Joseph's boy?" A few minutes later, they wanted to throw him off a cliff. What's going on here?

Jesus tells a story about the prophet Elijah, and how he helped a non-Jewish widow in Zarephath and cleansed the Syrian Naaman of his leprosy. Both stories are found in the Hebrew Scriptures, but the people of Nazareth didn't like to think that God's Messiah had come to bring freedom to people like them! God's Messiah was meant for God's people, not pagan Gentiles! Anybody who says so is simply wrong, and ought to be rubbed out... killed... pitched over a cliff... maybe even crucified!

Here's where we need to drill down into the scriptures a bit... we can't- don't want to- eliminate the sense of Jesus had come to set us free from all that binds us up. But, as the same time, Jesus is trying to teach us that freedom isn't just all about us; it's not all about you- it's about the other guy, too. Realizing that- getting it- is a big part of what truly sets us free. Perhaps what Jesus is trying to tell us is that he has come that we might not only have freedom from whatever handcuffs our heart... but that we've been given freedom to push out into something new, something unusual, something beyond ourselves... beyond just us. Jesus is all about freedom from sin and anxiety and hardship... but he's also all about freedom for others; with the rights that come with being a child of God come also the responsibilities of being a child of God. Are you up to that? Can you deal with the entirety of the freedom Jesus offers?

On this Independence Day, let's see if we can push a few buttons that way Jesus must have pushed a few buttons in Nazareth...

- Justice... how about justice for those who claim alternative gender identities- the gay, lesbian and transgender?
- Immigration... what does Independence Day mean for immigrants or those who have found themselves placed in bondage by the slave traders... It's a little ironic that we sang "The Battle Hymn of the Republic;" is that for everyone, or just for some of us? Our country fought the Civil War of the answer to that question.
- Love your neighbor and feed the hungry... is that just when the Dow Jones is over 10,000 or is it based on something beyond our net worth?
- We're proud to be an American, a Presbyterian, a member of Crestview; but is that just a status thing, or does it come with some God-given opportunities to do something special... and if we ignore those opportunities, maybe we're not so much God's chosen after all... and that's what really riled up Jesus' hearers in Nazareth.

If you felt your blood pressure go up some over one or more of those examples, you can understand how those Nazarenes felt, and why they wanted to toss Jesus off a cliff.

There's something about freedom that comes with a cost, but we don't like to be

reminded of it so much. Perhaps you know that most of the signers of the Declaration of Independence lost their wealth; twelve had their homes ransacked and burned; four of them had children killed or captured during the Revolutionary War; 9 of the 56 died during the conflict; five were captured and died in British custody. Declaring as “self-evident” the implications of freedom turned out to be a very costly thing.

The proclamation of freedom cost Jesus his life as well. They didn't kill him this time, but eventually they did. He could have claimed his freedom from the tyranny of pain and suffering- after all, he was in the form of God yet emptied himself and being found in human form, he gave himself up for us all. After all, it wasn't freedom from, but freedom for...

You saw a video at the opening of worship of some of our young people who gave up a week of their summer break... not freedom from hard work, but freedom for hard work... to help others. As I spoke with several of them, what I learned is that their freedom came with a cost... many of them were beat, tired, hot, thirsty, worn out... but it also came with a blessing. Whatever it cost them, the rewards exceeded the cost; you saw the video and you heard the words... in their own words.

That's what Jesus came to proclaim, and he set out from Nazareth to Capernaum and began to set people free... the next one he freed from a demon, and then several were freed from sickness... that that's just the rest of chapter four. Each one Jesus set free from something, he set free for a reason... how about you? If you are an American, a Christian, a member of Crestview... you've been set free for a reason... what is it?

Those to whom much have been given, much is asked.... freedom... what does it cost you?