



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday, July 7th, 2013 – Trinity VI

The passage selected for the sermon this morning is taken from the text from Deuteronomy read for the Epistle:

"Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, Him shalt thou serve, and to Him shalt thou cleave and swear by His Name. He is thy praise and He is thy God

**In the Name of the Father ✠ and of the Son
and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.**

Today is the day we celebrate our national independence. It is a nice sign of maturity in our national character, that we no longer think about our independence as freedom from England. It will be the rare soul tonight that watches the fireworks and thinks about Francis Scott Key on board that ship, watching those bombs bursting in air, and in doubt about the outcome. Very few will think about Valley Forge or crossing the Delaware. It will be difficult to find someone who even harbors a negative thought about the English, because they have become our most reliable, almost sole ally, in the preservation of freedom and its promotion in the world where that privilege is sadly absent.

What is nice about this detachment in our celebration of our independence is that we are no longer focused on what it is we have been freed from, but are more concerned

about what it is that we are free to be. In our national character, we vacillate between shallow imperative to protect our privilege and right to selfish indulgence, and the heart felt and deep belief that freedom is a tangible and precious quality of being, tied to our innate destiny, and the realization of the purpose of all men.

That is what I want to explore this morning, freedom in relationship to the purpose of man. Why are we created in such a manner that we crave freedom, and what is it we are supposed to do with our freedom when we find our selves graced by its presence. It is our nature to chafe under tyranny, to be offended that someone has an entitlement greater than our own, and that we can be impeded from the pursuit of our purpose. These material and historic tyrannies that we battle are reflections and

manifestations of the one true battle that we all fight, and that we are meant to fight.

We were created to be in the presence of God, to walk with Him in the cool of the evening, to commune with Him without intermediary, and to live forever in His grace and light and love. It was our destiny to know God to glorify Him and to do His will. By pride and by the devil, we were separated from that privilege for which we were created. The petty tyrants of this world, as awful as they can be, are merely the material and historical projections of the one tyranny under which we all suffer, and which, by nature, we know it is our character and destiny to oppose, the tyranny of death, the tyranny of separation from God, the tyranny of bondage to the devil.

In the reading from Deuteronomy, Moses is chastising the Jews because they neither appreciate their freedom nor exercise it for the purpose it was given. They were not brought out of Egypt to be a nation of historical and economic import. They were delivered from bondage to be made a people of God, a people that knew their destiny was to be with God, and serve Him with their being by doing His will and reflecting His glory to be a blessing to the rest of the world. Independence from Egypt was not the end of their journey. Their whole trek through history prefigures the journey that is universal. They are not escaping Pharaoh, they are engaging in a covenant in which they will face and overcome death.

But of course they lose sight. They complain when they are fed miraculously, they lose hope when they have witnessed the power and glory of God, and they waste their freedom on idols, and pursuit of their own selfish will, forsaking the purpose of their deliverance, forsaking the service of their God, forsaking their birthright, and forsaking eternal life. Their failure is recorded for us, the warning and correction they receive is delivered to us in Scripture, because we are inclined to follow them down the road of wasted liberty, separation from our purpose, peril for our eternal souls.

As Christians, we have been endowed with a unique liberty. Of all the world, we are the only people, a people chosen by God, through His grace and not our merit, that have free will. Before Baptism, and outside of Baptism, there is only the tyranny of sin and death. We are restored by that sacrament to our purpose and our privilege, to know God and to do His will. In the Collect for Peace which we say every morning the daily office, we proclaim that the service of God is our perfect freedom. By Baptism we are able to do His will, which leads to heaven, instead of our own wills, which will take us to hell.

Our Father gives us this freedom so that by grace we can choose to imitate Him and to please Him. That is what He wants for us, that is why we were created, that is why He gave His only Son to die on the Cross for, because He so loved us, that He wants every one who believes in Him to have His everlasting love and life. How do we please Him? How do we imitate Him? The path is clear, Our Lord tells us exactly what it is we have to do. Love God with all our heart and mind and soul, use our freedom to its intended purpose and become willing servants of His will. Love our neighbors as He loves us, love our enemies, pray for them and hope for their deliverance, even when they treat us spitefully, because God loved us, even when we were His enemies, and we treated Him spitefully.

We will celebrate our national freedom today by eating hot dogs and watching fireworks. It is a good thing to do. We need to celebrate this gift of freedom, which is a symbol and manifestation of the one true freedom, the freedom we enjoy because we have been freed from the tyranny of death, the freedom that we need to celebrate every day, by doing God's will, not wasting the gift, but exercising our freedom by becoming His cheerful obedient and willing servants. *Amen.*