



Sermon, July 3, 2016
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Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

Sermon Series: Come Meet Jesus
“Light from Above, Freedom Within”

Scripture: John 8:12-32

8:12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” 13 Then the Pharisees said to him, “You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.” 14 Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. 15 You judge by human standards; I judge no one. 16 Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. 17 In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. 18 I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.” 19 Then they said to him, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” 20 He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

21 Again he said to them, “I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.” 22 Then the Jews said, “Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come?’” 23 He said to them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. 24 I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.” 25 They said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Why do I speak to you at all? 26 I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.” 27 They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. 28 So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. 29 And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.” 30 As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

31 Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

Some background: The setting for today’s scripture reading is Sukkoth, the Festival of Booths. Sukkoth was one of the large pilgrimage feasts in ancient Israel that was celebrated by coming to Jerusalem for a seven to eight day festival. People set up little booths and tents to commemorate the time 2000 years previous when Israel wandered in the wilderness, living only in tents. One of the ceremonies each evening involved the

“Light from Above, Freedom Within”

lighting of large lanterns in the temple precincts, recalling the presence of the LORD as a brilliant column of fire in the tabernacle in the wilderness.

This celebration was repeated every night from the second night to the final night of Tabernacles. The brilliant lights, bathing the Temple and flooding the streets of Jerusalem, reminded the Jews of the descent of the Shekinah glory in King Solomon’s day (1 Kings 8:10-13) as the people look forward to the return of the Shekinah in the days of the Messiah (Ezekiel 43:1-5).

Sukkoth was actually a dual celebration: liberation from Egypt and God’s continuing provision and sustenance. Sukkot was also a harvest festival= “feast of the ingathering.” It is interesting, and perhaps providential, that this scripture reading should coincide with our church service being on the eve of our own national festival of Independence. You see, Sukkoth is a celebration of Israel’s independence from enslavement by Egypt. It is, in effect, a celebration of their own Independence Day, although there is not a specific day of being liberated. Rather, it is a week set aside to reflect and celebrate how God is the agent of deliverance.

This is all the backdrop for Jesus saying that he is the light of the world. He proclaimed that he is the True Light come down from heaven, just as the light in the wilderness came from heaven and the Shekinah came from heaven, so Jesus is come from heaven. The temple Lamps will burn out, but not the light from the realm of eternity.

Thus it is significant that Jesus uses the occasion to proclaim that he is the light of the world (the pillar of fire to follow, just as the Israelites did in the wilderness) and that, by continuing to dwell in his word, people will know the truth, and that truth will set them free. Knowing the truth will set us free = true liberation.

In our own country, Statue of Liberty raises up a torch, a beacon of freedom. Jesus says he is that beacon of freedom, in the same way that the Jews were celebrating their freedom from Egypt, 2000 years earlier.

For us as Christians in this nation, it is a sometimes paradoxical tension. As Christians, we carry forward through history the ideals and truths of

freedom. One of these truths is that all nations are under God, subject to the ultimate authority of God. All governmental and ruling authority is derived from God and is subject to God’s laws and oversight. As a corollary to this, no nation is the representative agent of God. No nation can claim ultimate human political authority or legitimacy. Human governments, empires, nations and political systems are all created for good but are all fallen, just as humans have been created for good but are fallen, and in need of restoration to their created purposes.

Human liberation and freedom is always relative, qualified, and contingent. It is always subject to the needs of the community, and subject to subversion by human forces. Sin and evil taint human freedom.

True freedom, true liberation is an internal state of consciousness and being. Jesus says, “Seek that in me. I bring that internal enlightenment.” Jesus brings that spiritual illumination that implants a light within each of us that will guide our ways: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”

This Independence Day, let us be circumspect in our celebration of national freedom. Let us recognize that every form of government is a form of subjugation of its citizens, whether it is to a shared governing document or to dictatorship of one or a few persons. Because we live in a society of persons beyond ourselves, our freedom is always limited by the needs and dictates of that larger society. Therefore, we can never proclaim to be absolutely free, we are ever and always merely provisionally free. True freedom is found within. As we grow in the knowledge of Jesus through his indwelling presence, we discover that we are free to love and care for our neighbor, that we are freed from hate and distrust of others as we realize the truth that we are all children of one Divine Parent, we are liberated from enslavement to the greed and rapacity of consumerist society, and our consciousness is released from the constraints of a purely materialistic understanding of the universe into a joyous embrace of a universe of mystery, beauty and meaning beyond imagining. This is our true freedom, brought to us by Jesus Christ.