

*Sermon for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year A, 3.vii.2005, 9:00 a.m.
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Zechariah 9:9-12; Psalm 145:8-15; Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19,25-30
Holy Communion, WOV Setting 5*

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and
Who is to come! Amen.

***“Come to me, all you that are weary and are
carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am
gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest
for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden
is light.”***

--Matthew 11:28-30

Our Lord must surely have seen people weighed down by
bondage of every sort. He was born, lived and died as part of a
subject population in an occupied country, executed at the hands of
the occupiers. Many called for freedom from the oppressors and
preached violent revolution. Judas Iscariot, one of the first Twelve
Disciples Jesus called to follow Him, may have been among those
'Zealots' of Israel. Jesus lived and preached a freedom of a different
order, a freedom to which He calls us by His Word, through the grace
of our Baptism in Him and in His Holy Supper.

Tomorrow, our nation celebrates its liberty and each American will do well to give thanks for that freedom for which so many have died, for which so many will die this day, and tomorrow and as far into the future as we dare to imagine. I can hardly begin to imagine how weary our sons and daughters on the front in Afghanistan and Iraq must be, how very much they would like to lay down the burden of war. But they take it up each day for the sake of their comrades, as their duty to this nation and to make this world and its people a bit more free from tyranny. What we celebrate on July 4th is liberty from arbitrary rule and the freedom to make important decisions about our own lives and to live with the consequences of those decisions. It is the liberty that has been withheld from the refugee by the warlord. It is the freedom for which people who have never enjoyed liberty before are willing to risk their own lives, just to be able to vote, just to be able to speak and live freely, regardless of how we may take such freedom and such liberty for granted.

But there is a freedom which cannot be purchased or defended with the blood of the battlefield. There is a liberation which itself promises to bring all war to an end, as the Prophet Zechariah


proclaims. That freedom is, ironically, freedom *from* the self and the selfishness that causes the peoples of the earth to live in fear and to die in war. It is freedom from that tyrant we all carry around on our backs as the children of Adam and Eve, the tyrant that holds us in bondage to self and keeps us from being free for God and others, as Saint Paul says he experienced time and again in his own life, as we all do, if we have the maturity of insight to see that struggle between the good we know and do not do and the evil we hate but nevertheless serve.


We begin our worship in the Lutheran tradition almost every Lord's Day not by declaring our independence from sin, but by frankly and categorically declaring our bondage to it before Almighty God, Who can neither deceive nor be deceived. "We confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves." What a statement! Don't Lutherans know about 'free will'? Of course we do, if by 'free will' you mean the ability to have a thought and to act on that thought.

But the problem is who or what stands at the center of that thought, of all that thinking and acting that makes up the waking life

of any man or woman. If the One at the center were God and the love of God, then there would be no bondage to sin, then we would share instead in the freedom of God Who creates, Who acts out of sheer love. Then there would be no injustice, no murder, no abuse of the weak by the strong, no misuse of the power to speak and write for the purpose of deception. If our free will were grounded in the freedom of God, then ours would be a world far different from the one into which we have actually been born, the world in which we actually live.

Our world is as it is, and we are as we are, but the God Who created and sustains us will not let it go at that. Into this world and into our lives the living God interposes His very self in *our* very self. God declares our freedom from slavery to self by being free for others and free, in our very own humanity, for the God He calls 'Father' with a human voice. And this one free man, Jesus the Christ, invites us to that freedom not by striving, not by fighting, but by simply accepting the freedom He has won for all humanity. There, where men and women drop their heavy burdens of hostility toward God and others, where they declare not victory over others but an

armistice in their weary struggle to live at the expense of others, where through Jesus their Brother they turn again toward a common Father, that peace which sees in each human face a sister or brother cannot be far away. Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit both now and forever. Amen.

S. D. G. !