

*October 2, 2011*

# ***“The Cost of Freedom”***

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# The Cost of Freedom

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-17; Psalm 19;

Phil 3:7-14; Matthew 21:33-46

Pent 16A

Sermon by Sharon Rhodes-Wickett

October 2, 2011, Claremont UMC

There are many ways we can assess the cost of freedom. Will Rogers once said, "Freedom doesn't work as well in practice as it does in speeches."<sup>i</sup>

We aren't looking at freedom in speeches today, but rather in story and theology. For the past several weeks we have followed Moses and the Hebrews as they left the life of slavery in Egypt in search of freedom. We saw them leave everything behind as they trudged through desert and swamps.

They grumbled and complained about the accommodations and the food and said slavery was looking pretty good compared to this kind of freedom!

Freedom is hard work! There aren't the slave masters telling you what to do when. They aren't there providing you food, yes – lousy food – but food nonetheless. It was a well trod path between the barracks and work, instead of this wandering around in circles in the desert.

Then a decisive point in the story comes when they arrive at Mt. Sinai and Moses receives what we call the Ten Commandments, or the Decalogue, or the Prohibitions. They are rules for the free!

Freedom comes with ground rules, boundaries within which life can thrive. Without ground rules, there is only chaos. If only chaos then why not go back to Egypt? You know they grumbled about going back to Egypt. In many ways it was easier there. They didn't have to make any decisions there. They were all made for them.

Now, they have the choice to return to slavery or to proceed in the wilderness with freedom. True freedom is found in loyalty and commitment to God. The commandments of God form the foundation of a new life. With freedom comes responsibility.

Often people don't want the responsibility for their own lives, which is an issue that comes up many times in Exodus as the people struggle in their new life of freedom. Benjamin Franklin once said, "Those who desire to give up freedom in order to gain security will not have, nor do they deserve, either one."<sup>ii</sup> They were free to make that choice.

The Ten Commandments gave the previously enslaved people ways to be in relationship with one another. They needed to learn how to moderate their own desires and impulses as they lived out their freedom.

Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach wrote, "As far as your self-control goes, as far goes your freedom."<sup>iii</sup>

In this country we all agree to drive on the right side of the road. There is freedom in that agreement and when we all exercise self-control and live within the agreement we are freed from worry about who will drive where.

When someone does not exercise self-control and drives on the left side, then disastrous consequences arise. If a fatal accident occurs, loved ones may face towards the sky and cry "why?" "Why did you do this, God?" "How could you let this happen?"

This is called theology! And we would say, "God didn't let this happen... WE did!" The one who drove on the wrong side of the road let it happen. As Steven Covey wrote, "While we are free to choose our actions, we are not free to choose the consequences of our actions."<sup>iv</sup>

Many of us are reading Bill McKibben's book "Eaarth" in preparation for the Brave New Planet Conference coming up the end of this month.

McKibben paints a gloomy picture of the health of our planet. Our planet would surely be more pristine as God intended if we did not have free will. If God directed our every move, I feel confident that God would have made different choices than we did and do.

But human beings have the freedom to make choices, and wrong ones at that! We have the freedom to exploit the planet to perpetuate life styles that earth cannot support. We have the freedom to promote economies that demand continued and escalating growth which is absolutely unsustainable.

We have the freedom to live in a such a way that poverty is on the rise and many species of animals and plants are now extinct.

Surely God laments what we have done and continue to do. We have not shown self-restraint that freedom requires. We have allowed greed to move into our over-stuffed lives and make itself at home. And our earth-home cannot take it.

The parable in Matthew also speaks of freedom and the choices we make. Jesus made the choice to go to Jerusalem, to go into the seat of power and confront the authorities.

"The last line of this text tells us that the parable of the Wicked Tenants was directed at the religious leaders. They were offended by the parable and wanted to arrest Jesus. This text comes after the "Triumphal Entry" of Jesus arriving in Jerusalem. Then there is the story of the cleansing of the temple, the story of the fig tree, then Jesus' authority is questioned, then the story of the two sons, then the story for today. The text must be taken with its context. Jesus is in direct conflict with the religious authorities, and of course we know that it is coming to a head and will end badly. There is a long lead up to the death and transformation of Jesus, which is a dramatic culmination of the gospel stories." <sup>v</sup>

Jesus had other choices available to him.

He could have gone back up north to his own region and settled down and raised a family. That's what most people did.

Jesus exercised his freedom to head south to confront the authorities on their rigidity and judgment. That decision had consequences that meant his life was given up. And those consequences turned out to be transformation, not only for Jesus Christ, but for we who follow Jesus.

The readings from Philippians have the familiar theme of emptying ourselves in order to gain. That theme is here again today. Paul writes that everything is as a loss when compared to Jesus. Paul said to lose everything in order to follow Jesus is far better than having what he had before. He writes of transformation.

On this Word Communion Sunday we are aware that Christian worshipping communities share in the cup and loaf all over the world, in many languages, in many styles, in many ways. We rejoice and celebrate this is so.

And as we celebrate, we recognize that we who live in this country have tremendous impact on the rest of the world by the freedom of choice we make. Our lifestyles cause poverty in other parts of the world. Our lifestyles cause climate change whose ripples go around the world.

Yes, we have freedom... and with it comes huge responsibility. While we may not be able to control the consequences of our choices, we can educate ourselves on them, and then make difference choices so that the negative consequences can be greatly diminished.

As Jesus' followers, we need to face the powers, the authorities, and advocate for God's creation and God's vulnerable people.

And those Ten Commandments? They still work for us. They help to shape a life in community... indeed a world community... that is more holy and more life affirming.

So this one thing we do: forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead.  
Press on toward the goal of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.best-quotes-poems.com>  
<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.thinkexist.com>  
<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.best-quotes-poems.com>  
<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.thinkexist.com>  
<sup>v</sup> <http://www.processandfaith.com>