

## **Called to Freedom**

**Galatians 5:1, 13-26 Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20, 07-01-2007**

Every year the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, of which Colebrook Congregational is a member, has an Annual Meeting. We are a small Association, only About 430 member churches, so our meeting turns into a family reunion of sorts. Our motto, so to speak is "Faith, Freedom and Fellowship. Our meeting strongly emphasizes Fellowship. We do not vote on any statements that govern our members because we are all autonomous churches, which determine policy within their own walls with no outside direction. This is our Freedom. The Faith that sustains us in our diversity is faith in Christ as the cornerstone of the church.

This year our Annual Meeting was held in St. Petersburg, Florida. As I traveled from Milwaukee to Florida and back with two of my colleagues, a pastor from Wisconsin and one from Illinois, I could not help but think of how free we are in this vast country of ours. We drove the National Association truck full of supplies for the meeting. We went from Wisconsin to Illinois, to Kentucky, to Tennessee, to Georgia and then Florida without ever having to stop at a state line to have our identification checked as we moved from one place to another. Our passports did not have to be turned in and registered when we stopped at a motel and we managed to pass by the truck weighing stations because we only had 6 wheels. My fellow travelers, the Rev. Cindy Bacon from Heritage Congregational Church in Madison, WI and the Rev. Katherine Rust, interim pastor in Galesburg, Illinois, did all of the driving. I was along as a some-time navigator and as the entertainment committee.

Then after my return to Wisconsin on Thursday, I became acquainted with a little card called a "broadband networking wireless notebook adapter" I can put in my laptop and I am free of phone lines and other ways of connecting to the Internet. I had a sense of freedom after I figured out how to find and connect to a wireless network. How very strange it was to find myself so free, yet, still so connected. This is a blessing as well as a curse for most of us in our world. We can never fully get away from anything or anyone. But it seems to be a choice we make and we make freely.

Freedom is a great and wonderful gift given us by our Creator. God's gift of free will enables us to chart our course in life for better or for worse.

Paul writes of the opposing pull of good and evil in his letter to the Galatians. He clearly spells out that the fruits of good living and the spirit are set against those of the pull of the flesh. He seeks to guide those who read his letter to practice the better way of living and moving and having their beings. He knows that everyone possesses the gift of freedom and he cautions us to remember that with that gift comes a large measure of responsibility.

Too often we just want to be free without counting the cost to ourselves and to those around us. We want to do just as we wish closing our eyes to the damage we cause when we think only of our selves and our own selfish whims. Our freedom, Paul tells us, is to be used to love one another not to devour each other. In spite of our throw away culture, we are never to use up another person and toss that person away when we have finished with them.

This love and concern we are to have for others is not just limited to close relationships but it is to be extended to those relationships, which also exist between all people in the world. This is a wonderful theory that has yet to be put into practice. I wondered what Scotland had done to deserve the attack that took place just the other day. Had it chosen to stand beside an ally, had it been too free? What's the problem? Until we are able to help all people understand the value of the human lives we have been given by God, and the right to live them, this kind of sad event will continue.

One group of people taking on another has been a matter of history. It has been true since the beginning of organized social units. When one group of people believes it has all the answers to the world problems and questions and also believes that one way is the only way to think, we run into trouble. How we set this right is a big puzzle. It takes people of understanding and peace who respect each other and seek answers by sitting down and working things through.

It is difficult to accomplish this in one fell swoop and sadly I suspect world peace is a long way off for all of us. This does not mean that we simply give up. It means that we begin to do what we can one person at a time, right where we are. It means that we look at one another with the eyes of Christ understanding that we all are different yet focusing on what it is that draws us together. We focus too much on what it is that separates us and not on what it is that unites us across all lines. This way of looking at life works when we choose to become a little more caring toward others. If, on the other hand we choose to bite and devour others we will be consumed, too.

During this next week when we celebrate the Fourth of July, our great remembrance of the establishment of this free nation, we need to remind ourselves that with our great freedom comes much responsibility to God, to our selves and to our world. Then we need to choose to exercise that freedom wisely. -- Amen