

"Freedom to be Faithful"
2 Kings 5:1-14

July 3, 2016
Galatians 6:7-16

New Horizons Presbyterian
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

We celebrate a faith of liberation. In Jesus Christ we are set free to live out our faith with enthusiasm and joy. The call of God in Christ is always in one's best interest. God is for us from the moment of creation. God is invested in us and desires our lives to become testimony to God's grace and mercy.

I was stunned when a couple new to the congregation I was serving said that the thing they liked about being Presbyterian was that you could believe whatever you wanted. Actually I was horrified as entrance into our church does carry some expectations.

Freedom is a significant part of our creation as humans. From Adam to the present, humans have misunderstood that freedom. We allow ourselves to think we have a better idea. We fail to turn to God and the Holy Spirit for guidance and insight; plunging on as we see fit.

Naaman desperately wanted his leprosy to be cured. Yet he was insulted by the prescription Elisha gave. He felt humiliated by being told to wash in the river Jordan. (Today that might make sense as I understand the Jordan River is quite dirty.) Naaman confused his freedom to say "no" with freedom of acceptance of the prophet's wisdom.

The Galatians worried about the folk who were unable to share fully in the expectations of the new community of faith. Paul advises them to gently and carefully draw them back; to restore them to life in the community. The unsaid guidance suggests that it is not appropriate to simply brush them off and be relieved by their absence. "Work for the good of all" includes holding those who stray in prayer and inviting their return to faith-focused life.

Jesus' commissioning of the seventy (or 72) was a call to all who would follow to become Christ's agents in this world. Those followers could have understood this call as an opportunity to collect their own little band of followers; to become known as a great teacher such as Jesus. But Christian leaders are not free to do as they please. Their call is to live in relationship with Christ; to seek God's direction in all things. This relationship frees us from worry about ourselves. It frees us to develop relationships that will nurture our families, build up the community of faith. This freedom makes it possible for us to contribute to the development of our nation and world in ways consistent with God's will for the entire creation.

The freedom we enjoy as people of faith is not about building up credits in heaven! It is about responding to the great gift we have been given in Jesus Christ. It is the freedom of living as God's people, allowing ourselves to belong to God and God to direct our lives.

Jesus sent the 70 out with no resources. He called them to rely on that society's rule of hospitality. He called them to trust God's leading as they shared the good news of the mercy and compassion of God. He called them to build God's kingdom.

The 70 returned proud and joyous. They had experienced wonderful things! People were healed. Their words captured the attention of the crowd. They felt successful. Jesus told them not to get big heads. He wanted them to understand that the authority bestowed on them was only as a conduit for God to act in their lives. Their reward was only knowing their names were written in heaven.

Keeping the faith is hard work. The fact that the rewards are in the relationships we establish with our Lord and God and those whose lives we touch is hard to accept in a society that continues to revere acquisition of recognition and goods and power over others.

Our call is a call to community --- a community of faith. Yes, we are free to turn away. We are free also to return --- to come to this table --- acknowledging the Lord of our life and the savior of the world. May we celebrate the freedom we have received.

Amen.