

***A New Orientation – Let Freedom Ring©***

**Luke 7:18-23; Psalm 146**

**July 5, 2015**

**Dr. Sharlyn DeHaven Gates**

On July 2, 1776, Congress secretly voted for independence from Great Britain. And on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1776 the Declaration of Independence was published. The 13 American colonies became a new nation and was no longer a part of the British Empire.

While the wording for the declaration was being revised, John Adams (one of the men who signed the document and later would become president) wrote this to his wife, Abigail:

*“The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epoch in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival.*

*It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forever more.”*

Well, Adams was off by two days but he sure got the rest of it right, didn't he? 239 years later we continue to celebrate in just the same way he predicted.

While historians do not all agree on the facts of how, and when, all this came about, our focus here today is not so much about when it happened, or exactly how it happened, but *that it happened*.

Did you hear in John Adam's letter what he wrote? He said that Independence Day *“ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty.”*

What a great illustration for our Psalm of Reorientation (the time when finally life is becoming new and good again, after a crisis.) These last psalms of the Psalter are all about praise. These are the *Hallel* songs I told you about when we first began this series on the Psalms.

*Hallel* means *Hallelujah!* It means *Praise the Lord!* They are songs of praise because God is so worthy of our praise. God is faithful and trustworthy, and God has done amazing things for the psalmist and for us.

As we celebrate our freedom – our independence – we could call our 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration a really big *hallel* song! A loud – VERY loud – *hallelujah!* Praise the Lord for our freedom, for our deliverance.

When we hear the words Jesus said to the disciples of John the Baptist – John, who must have known that soon he would be dead; who needed to be reassured that Jesus truly was who he believed in – Jesus told them to go back and let him know what has been happening.

Go tell John ...“the blind can see, the lame can walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.”

If that isn't reason for *hallelujahs* then I don't know what is! God has been about the business of setting people free for a very long time.

And what is interesting to me is that, added into the same very exciting sentence, there is good news brought to the poor. I mean it isn't enough that blind people can see, or that the lame can now walk and leap and run, or that lepers are healed, or, as shocking as it is to hear, dead people are no longer dead. That's an amazing list of things for celebration, isn't it?

Oh, but that's not all! Just as important as all those fantastic acts – at least just as important to Jesus – is that the poor are brought good news.

And what in the world could that good news be that would be as good as all those other really good things that happened?

The answer to that, I think, is found throughout the psalms. We read that God rescues the poor, the needy, the prisoners. God cares deeply for the marginalized and for those who are oppressed and hated. In fact, Jesus had just preached about it ...

*'Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.  
'Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you will be filled.  
'Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh.*

*'Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven;*

Roberta Bondi, one of the wonderful speakers at the seminar I attended on the Psalms says: “God is great because he hobnobs with the little people – not the great. He lifts up the downtrodden. He is a God of protection of the little ones – the ones powerful

people keep down. He is a God of justice; a God of compassion; a shepherd who cares deeply for his sheep.

Roberta told us a story about a sheep named Thomas that she loved. She is a weaver and when she first started weaving, she wanted to find just the right wool. She discovered a woman named Lynn, who raised sheep and sold the wool, so Roberta traveled quite a distance to see the sheep and to purchase the really good wool.

Lynn loved her sheep very much, and did everything she could to protect them. She kept a baby monitor in the barn so if anything happened she could jump up and rush out to the barn to see what was wrong.

One of the neat things Roberta witnessed was how, when the sheep were coming into the barn for the night, each one, one by one, as they passed Lynn, would raise their face up for a kiss. Not only did Lynn love the sheep, but they loved her and felt safe and cared for with their beloved shepherd.

Roberta fell in love with Thomas, a sheep that weighed almost 300 pounds. She would travel to see Thomas as often as she could. She said Thomas' wool was like silver. Sadly, Thomas hurt his back and had to be put to sleep. Lynn called Roberta so she could come see him one more time before that happened.

Roberta said she wove his wool into other wool that were Thomas the sheep's favorite colors – red (for the apples he loved), green (for all the grass he grazed in) and blue (for the sky he enjoyed being under). She took that beautiful yarn and made a sweater, so she could be wrapped up in the love of Thomas and of God.

Like Lynn with her sheep and Roberta with Thomas – God delights in us!

It is fitting that we end this sermon series on the psalms of praise. C.S. Lewis wrote: "Real praise is spontaneous. We can't help it!" It's like walking along the beach and seeing Moon Jellies – those little fish that look like white linen handkerchiefs. We spontaneously cry out "Look! Look at that! It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen!"

That's how real praise comes out. It's spontaneous. It rushes up out of us and is spoken before we even know it's coming! It is sheer joy and gratitude for the glory of God and for all He has created, and for all He has done for us.

Anthony Bloom, in the book "Beginning to Pray" writes that we are always beginning to pray. Each prayer is new every morning. He compares our relationship with God to how we are when we fall in love.

You know, all that passion, all that sharing our hearts and baring our souls to this one who loves us and whom we are head over heels in love with?

Bloom says “when God looks at us, looking at Him with such love, God sees the real us. And God finds us irresistible.

Our praise is a gift we can give to God, who loves us so deeply. Praise that is real comes from that place of gratitude and thanksgiving and trust for the One who loves us most, who delights in us.

Yes, we are free. We celebrate with joy the independence we have as Americans. It is a privilege to be in this great country. But, it is an even greater joy – and one that extends far beyond the borders of our United States – that reaches around the world to all people who are governed in various ways.

This is the freedom we have with God. This is the freedom we have been given through Jesus – freedom from sin and the chains of death; freedom to live in hope, freedom to love as he loves us.

Because of this freedom we can shout *hallelujah!* with the psalmist and with all who know this great love.

*Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!*

© Copyright 2015. All Rights Reserved.