

KITCHEN COUNTER MUSINGS OF REV. MARK

July 6, 2025

ON FREEDOM AND FORGIVENESS

My son, when he was eight years old, ran out of my church one Sunday yelling, "I'm free! I'm free!"

The little snot! He obviously forgot that I walked out of church first to greet those leaving. During the third shouting of his new mantra, he ran by me and I scooped him up, saying something like, "not quite as free as you'd hoped, right little man?"

Terror came over his face as the exiting congregation began to back up behind us, eager to see how this father/son drama played out. He looked back at the log jam of departing parishioners and, the manipulative budding theologian, looked at the throng of worshippers and said, "He has to forgive me, right?!" The laughter that burst out from my church ensured his safety. (For the record, I was laughing, too. Inwardly.)

Of course, freedom is the topic of the day. Everybody is thinking and talking about freedom today-- Friday July 4, 2025, The Fourth of July. But it's not only today. Most of us spend our lives in pursuit of freedom.

For some, it is national freedom: emancipation from the colonial yoke. For others, it is civil freedom: civil rights and civil liberties, freedom from an oppressive regime. For others, it's economic freedom: freedom from hunger, poverty, and unemployment.

But for all of us, it is personal freedom. Even those who are campaigning most vigorously for the other freedoms I've mentioned, often know that they are not free themselves. They cannot identify what the oppressions or tyrannies are in their lives, but they feel frustrated, unfulfilled, and unfree.

I think this is why I believe freedom is a great Christian word. Jesus is portrayed in the pages of the New Testament as the world's supreme liberator. Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61 in the first sermon he preached. He said he came "**to proclaim release to the captives and to set at liberty the oppressed.**"

It's this freedom I long for most, knowing, and embracing, the freedom that Jesus describes. And, I believe, the key component of this freedom appears to be forgiveness.

Nobody is free who is unforgiven. If I were not sure of the forgiveness of God by his sheer unutterable mercy, I could not look him in the face. I could not even look you in the face. I'd want to run away and hide as in the Garden of Eden, because it was there in Eden, not at Watergate, that the device called "cover up" was first invented.

A leading British humanist was once interviewed on the BBC. In a moment of surprising candor, she said, "What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness. I have nobody to forgive me."

We proclaim a forgiveness from God, who entered our world in the person of his son, Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect life of love, and on the Cross identified himself with our sin and guilt. God in Jesus bore in his own innocent person the sin of a world, and he did it in order that we might be forgiven.

If only we could embrace that forgiveness and let go of guilt. Guilt is the first tyranny, the feeling of unforgiveness. A Psychiatrist at Yale once told me that half the patients in the Psych wards could walk out today if they could believe, and embrace, forgiveness.

I pray that we in the church know forgiveness. As Jesus said during his public ministry, "**If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed** (John 8:36)." Forgiven, and freed.

Josh is preaching at his church the weekend of July 27-28 (they have a Saturday night service). I'm tempted to go up there and shout, "I'm free" and see how he likes it!!

But, I won't. That's not the freedom I want. I'll listen to his message instead. In the words he offers about Jesus I have a better opportunity of finding the freedom I long for.

Happy Fourth of July to you all!

Mark