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Chapelwood UMC, Lake Jackson

Christ Sets us Free
From Baggage
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

This is the Fourth of July. It looks like the weather will cooperate and we'll be able to have our fireworks displays. That's good. A good fireworks show is a wonderful way to celebrate our Independence Day.

As we watch the fireworks this evening I hope we'll remember that one of the reasons we shoot off fireworks on the Fourth of July is to remind us of the battles that had to be fought to win our independence. The signers of the Declaration of Independence knew that they would pay dearly in the battle for independence, and they did. Some died. Some were imprisoned. Some lost homes. Some lost family members. They all paid a price, as did thousands of others who fought beside them. Freedom was so important that they were willing to put their lives on the line to gain it. They put a system of government into place to maintain and protect it. And thousands of Americans have died to protect this freedom and to offer it to others. For Americans life without freedom is no life at all. For Americans, the words of Patrick Henry, "Give me liberty or give me death," are not just words. We truly believe that life without liberty is not a life worth living. We have and will fight to the death, if necessary, to be free.

We believe that the writers of the Declaration were exactly right when they wrote that our Creator has endowed us with certainly inalienable rights, and that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We believe we were created to be free, that to be less than free is to be less than human.

For the past The soul hungers to be free. We long to be free to enjoy the goodness of life. When our forebears had had enough, they declared their independence from the tyrants. They claimed the freedom which our Creator intended for us to enjoy. They declared that God has given us the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

As Christians we believe that God created us for greatness. We were created in the image of God. We are children of God. We have the potential to be godlike in holiness and righteousness. We were created to look into heaven and to fellowship with God. We were created to have power and authority over the created world and to defeat the powers of evil. In Christ we see what we were created to be. But it's a journey to become what we were created to be. We have to grow and mature to become what God intended for us to be. And we have to be free to complete that journey. Most people don't fulfill their potential because they are imprisoned by restraints that hold them down and hold them back.

Tyrants that take people's freedom away make it difficult for them to achieve greatness. But tyrants are not the only things that take people's freedom away. One couple who completed the Dave Ramsey program and eliminated all their debts talked about feeling free for the first time in years. They said, "We live in the land of the free, but we weren't free. We had all these things. They made us happy when we first got them. But then we spent years paying for them. We didn't own them. They owned us. We were working harder and harder to pay for them and to take care of them. But then we took seriously Paul's instructions to owe no one anything but the debt of love. We felt that Christ was calling us to serve him and not the credit card companies. Now we are free to do the things we feel Christ is calling us to do. We're free, and

we don't ever intend to get tied up in frivolous debt again." This couple was free to become the people Christ wanted them to be when they let go of stuff.

The blood of the patriots set us free from tyrants. But the blood of Christ sets us free from all forms of tyranny. For the past two weeks ago, we have been reading stories in the Gospel of Luke in which Jesus set people free. Week before last we looked at the story of a man who was bound up by the craziness of his family and neighbors. In an insane world, the sanity of Jesus freed this man to return to his right mind. Last week we read the story of Jesus freed three men by calling them to let go of their misplaced loyalties to people in order to follow him. We can only become what we were intended to be by putting Christ first and giving all our other responsibilities to him.

This morning we are looking at another story of Jesus setting people free. He called together seventy of his disciples and sent them out in pairs to the towns and villages to prepare the way for his coming by continuing his work of setting people free from the forces that oppressed them: disease, demons, hunger, and ignorance of the truth of God. They were to set the people free from despair by proclaiming the good news of the coming of the Kingdom of God. However, Jesus knew that before the disciples could set others free, they had to be set free themselves. They had to be set free from baggage. He told them not to take anything with them except the clothes on their back. He wanted them to be absolutely free from all distractions, so that they could concentrate totally on the task at hand. Baggage is a distraction.

Do you know what the Latin word for baggage is? It's *impedimentum*. And that's exactly right. Baggage is an impediment. It's a hindrance. We call it luggage because you have to lug it around.

So, why do we carry around so much baggage? Because we have a fear that we will need something and not have it. I was working in church camp at Lakeview once. I ended up on the work detail that involved unloading the baggage off the buses and vans, loading it into the back of a pickup and moving it to the cabins. One girl had three large suitcases filled to overflowing. I asked her why she brought so much stuff to a camp that lasted four and a half days. Her response was completely predictable. She said, "I brought anything I might need this week." The next evening, as we gathered for the worship service, we had to wait because her cabin was late arriving. When I asked their cabin counselor why they were late, she said it was because this girl had just the perfect outfit for the occasion, but it took her twenty minutes to find it. The next morning we had to take this girl to the infirmary because she tripped on her luggage getting out of bed and bumped her head. Then she pulled her back lifting one of her bags. That's the way the whole week went. She didn't fly very high that week, because she was weighed down with baggage. And she was weighed down because she was afraid not to have anything she might need.

But there is a simple way to deal with that fear. When you find yourself carrying around something because you may need it sometime, remember these words, "God will provide whatever you need when you need it." If you believe that, you will be freed from a lot of baggage.

Recently I made a reservation on one of those airlines that charges you for each bag you check. I hated to do it. I always look for an airline that doesn't charge you for bags, or at least let's you check one bag for free. I'm a cheapskate. I hate wasting money, and paying for bags feels like a waste of money to me. I was just fuming about it, as I was packing. I went out and bought some things for the trip. Then it hit me. Why am I buying things here to take there, when I have to pay for sending them? I'll bet they have toothpaste where I'm going, and I can

just buy it there. I started eliminating everything that I could get in the city I was going to. Eventually I was able to pack everything I really needed in one carryon bag. It was wonderful. Not only did I save the cost of checking a bag, but I was freed from having to push and pull that big suitcase around and having to wait for it at the luggage carousel. Now I'm grateful to that airline for setting me free from all that baggage.

So, here's a traveling rule: If you can get it where you're going, don't take it with you.

I've told you before that I'm a member of the Brazosport Rotary Club. Our club is working with a project to supply a million meals to the poor people living in the slums of a South American city. This will require tons of beans and rice. The money has been raised to buy the beans and rice, but then there was the cost of shipping. As you can imagine, shipping that much food to another country is very expensive. It nearly killed the project. Then someone had a bright idea. They said, "Doesn't the country where we're sending this food grow beans and rice?" Well, yes, they do. "Then why don't we just take our money over there and buy the beans and rice there, rather than buying it here and shipping it there?" Sometimes the obvious is hard to see. So, that's what they're doing.

Life is so much simpler when you don't try to carry everything with you. You just have to trust that God has what you need where you need it, rather than thinking that you have to carry it with you.

"Now, preacher, are you telling us to get rid of all our possessions?" No. That's not practical. What I am telling you is that the more stuff we own, the more distracted and weighed down we will be. When Christ calls, we don't want to say no, or even, "Later. It will take me a while to drag all this stuff over there where you're wanting me to go."

I am not saying that you should get rid of all your possessions. I am saying that you will probably be a better disciple of Christ and enjoy life more if you lighten your load.

The disciples came back from their mission trip rejoicing. They accomplished far more than they ever imagined they could. And their names were written in heaven. That's another way of saying they were flying high. On that mission trip, these men experienced the glory that we were all created to enjoy. How did it happen? They were freed from their dependence on things. They were free to go where they were sent, free from the distraction of things, because they trusted God to provide what they needed when they needed it.

On this weekend when we celebrate our freedom, let us be careful not to give that freedom away by becoming slaves to excess baggage. Put Christ first, and trust God to provide what you need when you need it.

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