

Looking for the Light

a devotional from
ST. CHARLES AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Thursday, April 30, 2020

by Michael Jenkins

Freedom and Faith

A reflection on I Corinthians, chapter six

Freedom is a fraught term in our time. Endlessly malleable, it offers virtually any ideology an excuse to rant.

One wit of old said that it is a shame that many people who believe fervently in the freedom of speech don't take advantage of the freedom to think. I often recall what my grandparents taught me about freedom. My freedom ends at the tip of my nose. Advice I've been thinking about a lot these days of social distancing.

I'm not a politician, I'm a preacher. My field is neither political science nor epidemiology, it's Christian theology. So, for me, the value I place in freedom is not only evaluated in the scales of our U. S. Constitution (a document which I believe is truly one of the miracles of human achievement) but of the Bible, our Confessions of Faith, and the long experience of Christian thought.

The enduring temptation of every good value is its ability to draw us into the worship of the good instead of God. A sin, according to Saint Augustine of Hippo, is always the perversion of a virtue, the higher the virtue the greater the potential for evil.

No good value is immune to this reality. Every value is held in balance with other values, all of which are relative values. And the daily challenge of living a godly life is to negotiate our values in the presence of God.

What's at stake is nothing less than the first commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." To hold any value as an absolute, for which all others will be sacrificed, is idolatry. Idolatry largely consists in making a relative value absolute, and worshiping it in place of God. It converts an important concern into what theologian Paul Tillich called our "ultimate concern."

For us as Christians, there is only one absolute, there is only one ultimate concern: the Lord God. And the Lord God has liberated us from the bondage of self-serving,

self-aggrandizing, self-destructive sin to share his life, to live the life God shares as Father, Son and Holy Spirit through the power of his own Spirit.

In our history as Christians we have often sinned boldly and badly with regard to idolatry. We have allowed emperors and monarchs and tyrants to claim not only what we owe to Caesar, but also that which we owe to God alone. We have, in the name of our religious faith, committed crimes high and low, while justifying ourselves with the Machiavellian realpolitik that characterizes the characterless.

Honor, integrity, courage, and character are words that bring to mind sacrifice for the sake of others. They are words that remind us of the cost of love. Freedom is one of the great words too, but when exercised without respect for love, for the good of others, it becomes just another slogan for selfishness. And no politics based on selfishness is worth the cost of a soul.

Pray:

O God, fill us with your Spirit of Love and Truth, that all we do may be done as unto you. Hold us in your heart. Hold us in your hand. Realize within us that liberation of humanity, that freely we may walk in your Way.

Amen

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