**The Cost of Freedom**

**Text: Luke 9:23-24**

**Preached by Bruce D. Ervin**

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One Sunday in 1775, a pastor mounted his pulpit in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and preached a spirited call to revolution. Looking south toward the village green of Lexington, Massachusetts and the fight for freedom that had started there several months earlier, the Rev. John Seccombe launched a scathing attack upon King George and called upon his people, in the name of Christ, to join the fight.

Now you have to remember that at the time, Nova Scotia was the 14th colony. We know about the 13 colonies along the eastern seaboard. They, of course, rebelled against Great Britain and became the first 13 United States of America. Well, if you keep going up the coast past New England – which was the hot bed of revolutionary fervor in 1775 – you reach Nova Scotia. In the 1770’s, there was a fair bit of agitation in Nova Scotia to join the revolution. And the pastor of St. Matthew’s Congregational Church in Halifax preached the same kind of sermon that pastors throughout the colonies were preaching at the time. Unfortunately, there wasn’t quite as much public support for the Revolution in Nova Scotia as there was in New England. The pastor was arrested, thrown into jail, and the influential members of his congregation had to do some fast talking with the local authorities to save his life. They cut a deal: Rev. Seccombe would be released from jail and the church would give the Crown 14 acres of ocean-front property that it owned.

Fast forward to the 21st century. That ocean-front property is now worth hundreds of millions of dollars. It has been said that it was the most expensive sermon every heard in Halifax!

The cost of freedom is high indeed. In fact, the cost can’t be measured merely in monetary terms. Often folks have paid for freedom…with their lives.

I don’t know what the preacher’s text was that morning in 1775. Perhaps it was our text for today, which is found in the 9th chapter of Luke, verses 23-24. Jesus said:

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.”

The fullness of freedom is found in following Jesus. But you have to die to yourself in order to do so. The fullness of freedom is found in loving as Jesus loved and seeking the justice that Jesus sought. But doing so may cost you your life.

Just ask Edith Cavell. The daughter of a British pastor, she heard God’s call to serve as a nurse in the First World War. Serving in German-occupied Belgium, she cared for Allied and German soldiers alike. And, she helped Allied prisoners of war escape and make their way to England. She said, "Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone." Her faith had freed her from a narrow loyalty to nation. She offered comfort to *anyone* who was a child of God.

The help she gave to wounded Germans was unpopular with her fellow Brits, but it was the aid she offered to the captured Allies that cost her her life. She was arrested by the Germans, tried and executed. At her trail, she freely admitted to helping Allied soldiers escape. She did so because she freely followed Jesus, regardless of the cost. You see, she’d given-up her life for Christ’s sake a long time ago. Dying to herself, she had been raised to new life in Christ Jesus when still a young woman. When you die in Christ, you die to…yourself, your fear, your prejudice and your narrow loyalties. When you die in Christ and then experience the *freedom* of Christ, you know that *physical* death has lost its sting. Edith Cavell took up her cross and followed Jesus. For freedom, Christ had set her free.

The cost of freedom is high. Now let’s be clear that we’re talking about 2 kinds of freedom, and they’re both costly. There is Gospel freedom and political freedom. They are interrelated, but not identical.

Gospel freedom comes first. It’s the freedom from sin that is freely given to us in Christ; the freedom from sin and the freedom to live fully in Christ. We talked about this in Pastor’s Class. It’s the sin that is symbolically washed away in the waters of baptism; and the freedom of new life that is reflected when one is raised out of the baptismal waters. It is the freedom of living no longer for yourself but living in covenantal relationship with God and with all those whom God loves.

You see, living to yourself is really a form of slavery. When you live to yourself you’re enslaved to your own passion and prejudice and fear and pain. You’re enslaved to all of those things that cause you to turn inward and to shut people out and to think that it’s all about you; it’s all about me. But God’s grace frees us from all that. God’s love embraces us and accepts us, just as we are. God’s love includes all of God’s children, held with us in that same wide embrace. This is the grace that frees us from self and sin and raises us to the fullness of life with God and *all* those whom God loves. You and I and all of us: we are accepted! This is Gospel freedom.

“For freedom Christ has set us free,” Paul says. “Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1).

Gospel freedom paves the way for political freedom. There was a new birth of Gospel freedom in 16th century Europe. We call it the Reformation. It set the stage for the birth of political freedom in both Europe and North America. Because, when you feel – deep within your heart – the freedom that Christ has given you, you’re less likely to submit to the yoke of *any* form of slavery; including political and economic slavery. You’re more likely to put your life on the line in order to throw off the yoke of slavery. So it was at Lexington and Concord and Valley Forge. So it was in the horror of Antietam and Gettysburg and the Wilderness. So it was when African-Americans made their way north on the Underground Railroad, and confronted police dogs and fire horses and bone-crushing batons in Birmingham and Selma, Alabama. So it was when the troops hit the beaches of Normandy and braved the jungles of Vietnam and bloodied the desert sands of Afganistan. So it was when workers walked and sometimes died on picket lines at the mines of West Virginia and the assembly lines of Detroit for the right to organize and strike for safe working conditions and a living wage. So it is today when folks fight for a minimum wage that working families can actually live on, and when they struggle against the injustice of African-American men being arrested and sometimes killed, their only crime being driving while Black. You can be killed when you defend freedom. And many have. And many others have risked death in the defense of freedom and the pursuit of a new birth of freedom; a new birth of liberty and justice for all.

Freedom comes with a high cost, and there is virtue and valor in the willingness to pay that price. So I’m going to call by name all those in our congregation who have put their lives on the line in the defense of liberty and justice and I’m going to ask you to stand when your name is called… These are our veterans, who have been willing to pay the price; and we thank you.

It is not just the cost of political freedom that we remember this day; it is also – and especially – the cost of Gospel freedom. Political freedom, when not undergirded by Gospel freedom, is fraught with danger. You see, unredeemed humanity is no friend of freedom. Apart from the grace of God, and the new life born of such grace, freedom becomes an excuse to impose my will on others; freedom becomes an excuse to exercise power at the expense of others. It has been said that “power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve.” Those who serve have humbled themselves before the throne of God. Those who use their power to serve have humbled themselves before the laws of God and the laws of a nation under God. Those who use their power to serve have been freed from sin through the waters of baptism and take seriously the biblical mandate to seek justice and love kindness and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). Those who use their power to serve understand the biblical tradition of hospitality and seek to open wide the doors of one’s home, one’s church and one’s nation to the widow, the orphan and the stranger (Deuteronomy 10:18). Those who use their power to serve understand that God is the ultimate Author of all righteous laws, and no one is above the law. Political freedom is undergirded by Gospel freedom. For freedom *Christ* has set you free. And those who would live in such freedom must be prepared to bear a cross and die to self and be raised in Christ each and every day of their lives.

You see, freedom is not absolute. Neither Gospel freedom nor political freedom is absolute. In the Bible, freedom becomes flesh within covenant. In other words, freedom is lived out within the context of accountability to God, and to God’s people, and to “we, the people.” The biblical concept of covenant was brought to these shores by the Pilgrims, and there is a direct connection between covenant, and the Mayflower Compact, and the colonial constitutions of New England, and the U.S. Constitution. Freedom is lived within the boundaries of responsibility and accountability. We are ultimately accountable not to ourselves, but to God and to the covenant that God has made with all humanity through Jesus Christ. Thus the ultimate cost of freedom is to let go of your ego. That’s what you have to do in order to live your life with the heart of a servant. “Those who save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.” That’s the price that you have to pay to know the perfect freedom of following Jesus. Amen.