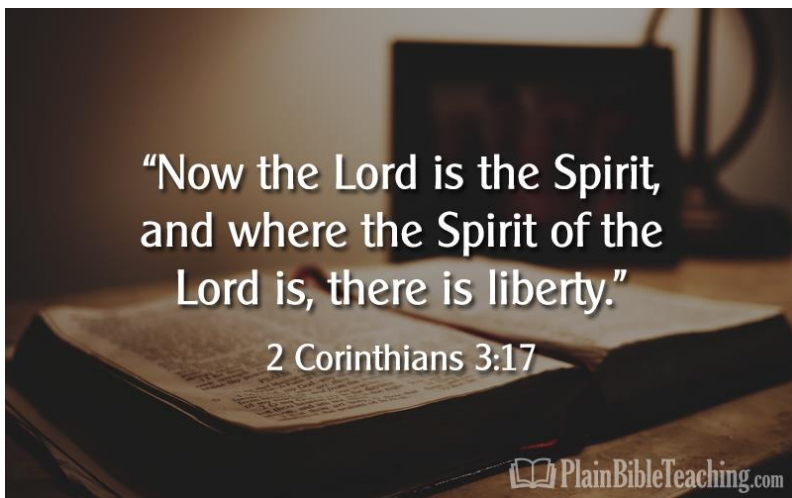


JULY 5, 2020 – 10:00 am
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost



FREEDOM FROM OR FREEDOM TO

ST. JOHN
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
AN OPEN AND AFFIRMING CONGREGATION

10207 Lincoln Trail
Fairview Heights, IL Telephone 397-6323
Website: www.stjohnfairview.org

Rev. Rosemary Captain

The church is now open for worship
every Sunday at 10 am

Prayers and Liturgy by Rev. Thom Schuman

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Sing, sing of God's
unalterable love!

We will rejoice as we walk in
the light of our God.

Tell everyone around you of
God's faithfulness.

We will share the stories of the One who experienced
our life in all its fullness.

Shout out loud of God's presence with us,
on this day and in all the days to come.

Justice and goodness are God's gifts to us;
truth and love walk by our side.



PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

In a world shaped by conflict, where we seem to be
slipping back into tribal divisions, you call us to welcome
those with whom we have absolutely nothing in common.
In a culture full of inequalities which only seem to be
widening, you call us to treat each person as our sister
and brother.

In a time of intensifying injustices which are found in
every community, if not in every neighborhood,
you call us to yoke ourselves to your radical hope.

In a lifestyle which idolizes the individual
to the exclusion of all others, you call us to notice
the parent who works three jobs,
the dementia-diminished senior,
the refugee family on the corner.

May we offer all that we are and all we have
to those who are in our midst, even as we pray to you.

Amen.

SCRIPTURE READING:

2 Corinthians 3:17 “The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Lord’s Spirit is, there is freedom.”



MESSAGE: On July 4, 1776 members of the Continental Congress signed the Declaration of Independence. The colonists wanted freedom from being ruled by England. They wanted to be free to establish their own government to rule themselves.

In the book of Exodus, we can read the story of the Hebrew people escaping Egypt and oppression by Pharaoh. With God’s help, they were freed.

When Jesus came, he taught the people how to be free from sin. Yet he also taught that we are not free from loving our neighbors.

The Apostle Paul taught the people that were converting to Christianity that they were no longer subject to the Law that Moses had given after the Hebrew children left Egypt. The only law that remained in effect was the one to love your neighbor.

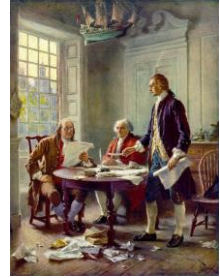
With freedom comes obligations to our family, community, neighbors, and even individuals along our path. The freedoms we receive have limits. These limits keep us from expressing our freedom at the expense of another person.

When Paul was writing to Galatia, he warned them, “do not use your freedom to indulge your sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”

Here are some more: We **can not** use our freedom to become immoral people. We **can not** use our freedom to abuse or use other people. We **can not**

use our freedom to avoid obligations within the church. We **can not** use our freedom to sit around and do nothing.

The second sentence in the Declaration of Independence says: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that **all** men are created equal that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." We must make sure **all** people feel equal and have the same rights in this country.



Our freedom is **not** a license to ignore our present pandemic. We **cannot** use our freedom to expose others to this Covid-19. We **must** wear our masks and keep social distance to protect our neighbors. The "love your neighbor" rule started in Leviticus, then Jesus is quoted in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, then Paul and James both remind us.

The freedoms we have received from God include our commitment to be in community and serve others. As the Disciples were forming new churches after the Ascension of Jesus, in Acts 2 we can get an idea of what those churches were like.

Acts 2:44-47 Common English Bible (CEB)

⁴⁴All the believers were united and shared everything. ⁴⁵They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. ⁴⁶Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. ⁴⁷They praised God and

demonstrated God's goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved."



As we once again have the freedom to assemble together in our sanctuary, these words from Acts should guide our way. Amen.

CALL TO RECONCILIATION:

The idol of our times is personal independence, but in truth, we are bossed around by our faults, our poor choices, the hurts we cause to others. Yet, by God's grace, we are set free from all these passions, so let us join in offering our confessions to the One who welcomes each of us with forgiveness and hope.

UNISON PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS:

It seems so simple, God of compassion, to offer a cup of cold water to a thirsty person, yet we know we worry more about how that might inflate our bill at the end of the month. We are to open our hearts to others, but they may need to be careful lest they slip on our icy attitudes towards them. People are looking for places to lay their heads, yet our spare bedrooms continue to be the place where only the dust bunnies sleep.

Forgive us, Radical Hope. You did not have to become one of us, but you did, so we might know your love. You did not have to welcome us into your family, but you do, so we might experience unexpected grace in our lives.

You did not have to die for us, but in Jesus Christ you did, so we might have life with you forever.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON:

Broken, we are made whole; thirsty, we are filled with living water; longing for a renewed relationship with God, we are welcomed with open arms by the One who forgives us.

Without a doubt, God's love never comes to an end. We will tell our kids and grandkids of the grace and peace which is ours. Thanks be to God, we are forgiven!

Amen.

THANK YOU FOR SHARING with your church, even when we could not worship in person.

SENDING:

Let us go forth to walk in God's light.

We will show others the way to God's heart.

Let us go to bring hope and healing to the world.

As complex as our lives, we will join Jesus in serving those around us. Let us go forth to gather up the little ones of our communities into our homes and hearts.

With the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are no longer strangers but God's family. Amen.

ST. JOHN PRAYER LIST: Dave Seneczyn, Eric White, Lori Riess, Charles Chamberlin, Donna Isselhard, Mitch Nallie, Candy Pearce, Greg Talley, Carol Meyer, Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess, Rich Schmitt, Shari Hamilton, Charlotte Watson, Becky Ballard, Bill Underwood, Nelson Libell, Father Roger Karban, Kathy Jeffries.