



Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Pastor Terry's Thoughts of the Week

Move>>Freedom!

The day to celebrate our national freedom is still coming up, but to talk of freedom means to talk of the things that bind us not necessarily way back then, but today. These are the things from which we need to be freed. Sometimes we can do it by ourselves, sometimes we can do it with the help of others, and sometimes we realize that unless God is there in our lives, we are going to remain as bound as ever to the things that confine us.

AA has, as the beginning of its 12 steps, as the first step, "I admit that I have no power over alcohol." Now, that may seem like a strange way to start to a new life, but it makes a lot of sense. We get caught up by bad habits and thoughts when we are afraid to change, and in order to change, we need to admit we are in a bad spot.

I've often recommended to others (and myself!) that we take that statement and find out what we need to put in the place of "alcohol". For example, I admit that I have no power over my anger – or my eating – or even my behavior! Once I admit that to myself and to others, I begin to realize I can't get onto a new path by myself. I need to get help. I need the help of friends, of those who are in the same boat as me, and a lot of help from God.

You may think all this is strange, but we, as Christians, have been aware of this necessity for centuries. That's what confession is all about. That's why we

come to God right away, before we begin our formal worship, and confess that we have sinned.

Martin Luther had a lot of quarrels with the Church of his day, but he also had a great love for the wonderful gifts that had developed in it over 1500 years. As he “fought through” the sacraments of the Church, he found that only Baptism and Holy Communion fit his definition of Sacrament: given by Christ, using an earthly element(s), and giving a promise of forgiveness of sins. But he also felt that confession was so very important. He tried his best to include it into the sacramental fold, but, by his own definition, he couldn’t.

However, he still emphasized it and in our catechisms we still have a section on the Office of the Keys (the gift to the Church of pronouncing forgiveness) and Confession – what it is and how to. Confession may not be a sacrament – but it surely can be sacramental – bringing us closer to our Lord as we release our sins because of his love.

Now we’re talking real freedom. We have this freedom no matter what our present physical condition may be or where we may be living. We have this freedom because Christ gave it to us by taking all our sins on himself.

There is an old saying that if someone saves your life, you should spend the rest of your life serving him. Well, there it is, folk. We have been saved by the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Out of gratitude we serve him and live as he would have us live. There is really no other way to say “thank you, Lord”. Live free. It’s a gift of God!

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-- Week of June 24, 2007