

Let us pray... God our Creator, true source of wisdom, whom all life flows, plant your word in our hearts today. May your truth take root and may your grace blossom in this place, cracking open the seed of love, where tendrils of hope bloom and grow... Amen.

This week many people will celebrate the Fourth of July... Our Independence Day, commemorating our countries freedom.

And freedom is something that has been sought after throughout human history, and in fact much of our planet's history, because a desire for freedom seems to be part of the very universe itself.

Afterall, scientist believe that the universe is expanding... And if you think about it, this idea of expansion, and of going out into the unknown, is an embodied image of what freedom often looks like...

Like when a bird is big enough to leave the nest, it flies away... Free...

And these images of boundless freedom are very much engrained into our society today...

The idea being, I can do what I want, how I want, whenever I want... Which is never really the case, or at least not the case for very long...

Even the universe itself, has its own laws that govern how it expands, how galaxies are formed, how planets fall into rotation, or how things can come to an abrupt end through black holes.

And for the birds... Though they may seem free, by flying away towards ventures unknown, they too can become someone's prey, or they can fly right into a glass window.

And as members of society, we are governed by laws, societal norms, and personal expectations.

So, what does it really mean to be free and how do we as Christians unpack that word?

Well, thankfully for us Lutherans, we have some excellent works to refer to...
Such as Luther's Freedom of a Christian.

A paper that is based on two ideas that almost seem contradictory to each other...

First, Luther states, "Christians are completely free lord of all, subject to none."

And...Second Luther states, "Christians are a completely dutiful servant of all, subject to all."

Encouraging us to hold in tension, that we are subject to none and subject to all...

His paper then unfolds by explaining what this actually looks like...

First of all, Luther defines freedom as a gift from God...

A gift that was given to us in Christ.

Because in Christ, we have been set free from the bonds of sin and death.

And because of this gift we no longer need to worry about getting into heaven, instead we can simply live our lives enjoying the gift of Christ and God's love.

In fact, this is such a great gift, that we are continually being filled with God's love.

A love so pure, that it doesn't stop once we are filled, because God's love never stops. It continues to fill us so that it can flow out of us...

Leaving no other choice but to share God's love with one another...

Through how we live, act, and talk in the world.

Or as Luther states... "Christians live in Christ through faith and in the neighbor through love."

Now there are many ways we can live in our neighbors through love, but today's gospel specifically highlighted one way, by welcoming the other...

Welcoming acts that can even be through simple gestures, like providing a cup of cold water for someone who is thirsty...

Because something so simple could actually mean the difference between life and death... Since we all need water to survive...

And healthy drinking water in our world today is not always so easy to come by...

So, if we are to take today's gospel seriously, about offering a cup of cold water, it can quickly become a daunting task...

In fact, this is such a big issue, I don't have time to explore what this all entails...

But I will leave you with the fact of the matter... That this issue was so important, Jesus chose to highlight it...

At the same time there are many other ways that we can welcome one another.

First off, you can simply show up, because you can't be welcoming if you are not there...

And once you are there, you can continue to be welcoming by being kind, or by listening without judgment, by being open and curious.

Because when we create welcoming spaces, we create a place for God's love to dwell...

Love that is continually filling us and flowing through us, because we are free to love and be love...

Which may sound like some big shoes to fill...

And while we are called in some big ways, we are also called in smaller ways too.

Because not all welcoming gestures need to be grandiose or planned out in advance...

It can be through a kind smile, an unplanned phone call to a family member or friend, a thinking of you card, or even opening the door...

Because when we believe like Luther encourages us too...

We are set free, to do as much good for one another as we can...

And by welcoming others in Christ's name...

So, let's turn societies images of freedom on their head...

Because as Christians we are free to fly high and soar like a bird, by coming up with expansive and unlimited ways to be welcoming to others...

As Christians we are called to expand our universe, by traveling into the unknown, and following Jesus' lead... Perhaps by figuring out how to provide healthy drinking water for those in need.

Because we are free... Free to live our lives in Christ. And in our neighbors through love.

Love that you can live out through welcoming others, because that is where Christ is calling us today... Amen.