

“Faithful Responsibility for Freedom”

B, Pentecost 6; Galatians 5:1-14

July 1, 2018; 10:00 am

Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO

Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

### **Galatians 5:1-14 (excerpts)**

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

By faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

### **OPENING OF WORSHIP:**

**Freedom.** We celebrate it this week, with the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, also known as “Independence Day.”

What is freedom?

What is faithful freedom?

What is the responsibility incumbent with freedom?

When are we not truly free?

Are some granted free and some not?

Today, we will sing and explore several “patriotic songs”—some you’ve probably sung your whole life, and some you might have never heard before.

Look and listen with new eyes and ears.

What are the messages, the themes, that rise up?

What does “freedom” mean in the words of these composers—many from long ago?

What does “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” and “justice for all” mean in their context and today, in ours?

### **“America, the Beautiful”**

Inspiration from on high was granted Katharine Lee Bates when, in 1893, she climbed Pike’s Peak in Colorado. From the top she said, “I was very tired. But when I saw the view, I felt great joy. All the wonder of America seemed displayed there, with the sea-like expanse.”

Almost immediately her mind conjured up the words to her poem that would later become one of the songs in the running for our national anthem, along with “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” and “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Today there’s a monument on Pike’s Peak to Bates’ achievement.

### **OFFERTORY:**

Arlene Waldorf

**“We’ve a Story to Tell”** (p. 562)

*We’ve a story to tell to the nations,  
a story of truth and mercy,  
a story of peace and light.*

*That darkness shall turn to dawning,  
and the dawning to noonday bright;  
A kingdom is dawning  
A kingdom of love and light.  
We've a message to give to the nations,  
A message that God is love.*

As you listen, consider this:  
What is *our* story to tell? What story do we tell today?  
How do we live out and in the “kingdom of love and light?”

*“Faithful Responsibility for Freedom”*  
How free *are* we?

I've been told to “leave politics out of the pulpit.”  
But, things are happening in this country of ours – the land of the free and the home of the brave – that are completely out of line with our founding principles, the Way of Jesus, and the message of the Bible—Old and New Testaments alike. Out of alignment with our faith that we profess as Christians.

#### **XIV. FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PULPIT**

Our Terms of Call – the Covenant Agreement between us –pastor and congregation states: in accepting pastoral leadership **we also accept your freedom of expression in the pulpit** as it pertains to matters of faith and faithfulness according to the insight of scripture, the work of the Holy Spirit, the traditions of the United Church of Christ, and the context in which we live our lives.

So, my faithfulness to my call to ministry and to God compels me to honor that freedom of expression. For, to stay silent in the face of such “out of alignment” and alternative pathways is to be complicit.

Your right to disagree with me is also honored. We are free to disagree with each other, as long as we show respect, talk in person and honor our covenant with open, understanding dialogue.

Back to freedom for today, and our message from scripture and culture both: Freedom is, first and foremost, a responsibility.

It's not a privilege – bestowed only on those of us lucky enough to be born here in the mainstream, of the dominant skin color, cultural background and orientation.

#### **Declaration of Independence**

“We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal: that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights: That among these rights are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

When the Declaration of Independence was written, neither women, nor non-white people nor slaves had the vote.

Ponder that for a moment. We, they, all of us who weren't white males were not citizens. Had no rights, no legal status.

Let's look at some hymns and consider what freedom and liberty and justice for all mean as we explore:

### **“God Bless Our Native Land”**

This one is a bit of a puzzlement. Maybe Janet or someone can do some further homework on it, once the internet is working again!

“God Bless our Native Land” was also known as “God Save the Queen (King).” A young seminary student named Samuel Francis Smith was translating a book of German songs in 1831 and liked the melody so much, he eventually wrote original lyrics so Americans could have a version of their own.

*That* is what we know as “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee” and we’ll sing it as the close of our service.

“God Bless Our Native Land” has the same tune, but different origins for the verses.

Stanzas 1&2: Siegfried Mahlmann;

Stanza 3: William Hickson

Another verse by Hickson (not on insert) adds more insight. You might never have heard these words before – I had not until we started practicing for the Patriotic Concerts on July 4<sup>th</sup> with Grace Church:

*“May peace her pow’r extend,  
Foe be transformed to friend,  
And all our rights depend  
On war no more.*

*May just and righteous laws  
Uphold the public cause,  
And peaceful reign.  
Home of the brave and free,  
Stronghold of liberty;  
We pray that still on thee  
There be no stain.*

And then, the final verse draws the circle wider – beyond our own shores:

*“And not to us alone.....  
But be God’s mercies shown*

*May all the nations see that men  
should brothers be.  
And form one family  
The wide world o’er.*

Taking faithful responsibility for freedom means being sincerely concerned about lands not our own. If we believe “God so loved the world”, then our concern must be for the whole world – not just our country. Even on Independence Day, when we celebrate our own liberty and freedom and ask God’s blessing on our Native Land.

### **“A Patriot’s Prayer”**

I could find nothing on the background of this prayer and song. If you google up “Patriot’s Prayer,” you find no end of chilling images and headlines about an alt-

right, white supremacy group in my hometown of Portland! I could not find it in a hymnal anywhere.

We are singing this for the patriotic concerts on the 4<sup>th</sup> at Grace Church (9:00 am and 1:00 pm with CUCC pie sale in between. And Rotary's BBQ booth too – don't forget!) I had never heard in before and thought the words well worth taking to heart.

Let's read it together from the bulletin.

**A Patriot's Prayer (Joseph D. Rojahn/James Moffatt)**

Lord of Hosts, I ask of thee,  
Save my homeland's liberty.  
Keep freedom's torch a-blazing bright,  
That all mankind may see its light;

And seeing, know and understand  
Thy plan of peace for ev'ry man.

If freedom's light is ever dimmed  
By foes without or foes within,  
Give me the strength, Lord, to withstand  
All danger for my native land!

Lord of Hosts, I ask of thee,  
Save my homeland's liberty.  
I could not live if bound by chains,  
I'd rather die in freedom's name!  
O gird me with thy courage, Lord,  
That I may carry freedom's sword. Amen

**“This is My Song”**

*“a song of peace for lands afar and mine”*

*“This is my home, the country where my heart is,  
here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine;  
but other hearts in other lands are beating  
with hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.”*

As you sing: What is your prayer for lands not your own? That is the responsibility of freedom.

**FREEDOM:**

We are free to care and support all our neighbors – red and yellow, black and white – they are precious in God's sight.

We are free to offer assistance without needing to know all the details – how they came to be in need.

We are free to preach and share our convictions – as Jesus did – even turning over some tables and upsetting the crowd at times.

We are free to follow the Bible and what it says about caring for the orphan, the widow and the stranger and immigrant in our midst.

We are free (hopefully) to go to work or school in the morning without fearing for our life.

We are free to stand up to bullies; to challenge subversive behavior and fight openly for the inalienable rights and pursuit of happiness for ALL. We are free to protest injustice to “the least of these” and not risk arrest for exercising that right.

### *“It's not about the Cake”*

Why are some among us granted the “freedom of religious convictions,” so that they may refuse to serve (or bake a cake!) for an orientation or culture they don't understand or agree with? But others – clergy even -- are arrested or hauled off when they protest cruelty to children in the name of government policy?

It just doesn't add up! Doesn't make sense!

Jesus turned over tables, spoke up, spoke out against hurtful actions and words toward neighbor, and challenged corruption and misappropriation of God's word and intent in scripture.

### **STORY of the HORSE**

Tell the story briefly.

People helping people. Showing great sensitivity for the feelings of others and the shock and pain they might experience if not given a gentle warning. One of the couples who stopped and talked to us had a German accent, and said they wanted to check in with us and see how WE were doing. It's a universal spirit – this care and compassion and sensitivity to others' needs and feelings.

A little farther down the trail, in a very narrow spot on a ledge, we encountered yet another surprise: llamas! We four had very little idea how our horses would react to these strange creatures from another land and species who look and smell funny! They pulled to the side of the trail, and we tried, one by one to coax our horses past the tall, furry beasts. My Satin horse finally

decided getting back to the trailer was more important than worrying about these strangers, and was deemed the “pro of the day for llamas.” She showed the way for the others by her bravery and all conquered their fear of the stranger and shared the trail and went merrily on their way.

A good model for us all.

*That's* the kind of country I want to live in. *That's* the kind of freedom I want to live in – the free country of my hopes and dreams. What are yours?

### **WE ARE FREE!**

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. To serve one another in love. “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

We *are* free to pray along with others, and offer support. Free to walk with each other on the road of freedom, whatever that looks like for our neighbors and fellow pilgrims.

### The Communion Table

A place where God so loved the world – the whole world – truly lives out that truth. *All* are welcome here – to gather around the circle that is the table. To remember together that “Christ has made you free” – no matter what, no matter who, no matter where on life's journey. Let us come freely to the Table of Christ, who has called and welcomed us, today and every day, into the Kingdom of love and light. Amen.