

America; The Land of the Free

You've sung the lyric thousands of times; "America, Land of the Free" which is of course embedded in our National Anthem. Our history boldly supports this claim. This land was settled by our own church ancestors who were separatists who craved freedom so much they were willing to leave behind prosperous lives in England only to face treacherous conditions here in New England to get it. Freedom is so deeply part of our cultural DNA that it is stated in which state's motto to "Live Free or Die?"

We have so devoted ourselves to freedom that we fought a civil war, where one side demanded that freedom be an absolute human condition for all American's; while the other side fought passionately for the freedom from a government that they felt was imposing laws on them. Indeed Abraham Lincoln stated it so elegantly in the Gettysburg Address following the decisive battle of that war that as a result America would experience "A New Burst of Freedom." Not only are we absolutely dedicated to freedom within our own borders, in the last one hundred years American's have shed their blood in two wars in Europe, the Pacific Ocean, Korea, Vietnam, Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan in a noble quest to make freedom possible throughout the world.

But one kind of freedom has been perhaps the most elusive in this country and the most difficult to define. That is our own beloved freedom of religion. In our own by-laws it requires us to believe that Christianity is the "dominant" religion and the Bible the sole source of ecclesiastical truth. Rather peculiar language where in the same paragraph it states we have total freedom to believe in God in any way our conscience tells us too. But so it is throughout mankind where religious beliefs can forbid freedom so much that it allows one

person to kill anyone who doesn't share their particular religious beliefs and another person to believe existence is simply random particles bonding temporarily to each other. So let's get back to our shared beliefs that we arrived at freely through understanding the life of Jesus Christ.

First, Jesus walked freely between villages and cities in an unrestrained attempt to share with us the meaning of God. So important was this mission, that he chose freely to walk or ride a mule into Jerusalem knowing full well he would be persecuted, yet he showed through resurrection that God's Love is absolutely shared by all people and all things. Second, Jesus knew that all too often humans would freely give up this understanding in the example of Judas where Judas simply gave away God's love in a confused attempt to grab money or power. We will never know why Judas did it ... but we certainly know in our own lives' the consequence of giving away God's love. Finally, Jesus showed us that by freely gathering together in love with others and daily sharing our bread as we will soon do in communion... that we transcend time and place and are part of a much larger universe of infinite love.

But the most important freedom of all that only through religion and faith can we acquire, is the freedom to forgive. To our beloved brothers and sisters in Charleston S.C., Sandy Hook Ct., Aurora Co., and Boston Ma. We pass forward our deepest sympathies to have suffered unspeakable horrors at the hands of gunmen, terrorists, madmen.... what ever you want to call them, we know that the unfortunate living relatives who possess the precious gift of forgiveness will be able to realize at some point that they have the ability to know as truth those timeless words uttered by Dr. Martin Luther King, "Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty, we are FREE at last!"

So on this day, July 5th 2015 let us rededicate ourselves to the freedom we are so blessed with as a nation.....and recognize how essential our freedom is by following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and continue to labor to provide freedom for others be it from poverty, ignorance or prejudice so that we may experience the ultimate freedom of living on earth as it is in heaven.

May the Lord add Freely to our understanding of these words: