

## Freedom - July 2, 2006

July 4, 1776 - Our founding fathers did something almost unthinkable - they declared their independence from England and the King's rule.

As an act of courage and faith in their new found country, delegates signed the Declaration of Independence.

And what is the Declaration of Independence? It was a document penned by the Continental Congress to explain to the colonist why they decided to break from England.

Of course this didn't come as a surprise to the colonists, but communication is important. Although this document was penned for the colonists, everyone knew the King would eventually see it.

Now this wasn't something that we should take lightly – after all, a couple of things come into play once you pen your name upon such a declaration like this.

First - It will probably mean war. No doubt England will retaliate somehow - maybe more sanctions, maybe sending in more troops looking for Weapons of Mass destruction - who knows. One thing for sure - the world as you know it is about to drastically change.

Second - What if England won the war? - What if the colonies just gave up? When this piece of paper is received in the hands of the English, they are going to look at who signed it and come after you - personally. The signers knew this. They all knew that once they signed their name, a price would be put on their heads and they were facing death for treason.

So imagine, here you are being taxed, and ruled by this king, you have no voice and you are ready to be on your own. Your state has decided to separate itself from England, the governing body of the colonies have decided to do the same. You agree with it - You want a new world - a new life that you were promised in the first place. But it is your name - yours - that needs to be on the document. You and some of the other leaders must sign this on behalf of the States of America that have united. It will probably mean death.

So what do you do? As the Urban Legend tells it, You can be like some of signers and sign the declaration in very small print so "hopefully" it can't be read by those in England.

That would be the safe way - you can tell everyone that, yes, you agree and you signed it, but "maybe" just maybe your life won't be in direct jeopardy.

Or, you can be like John Hancock. Sign your name with pride. The reason I said a minute ago 'Urban Legend' is because nobody signed the Declaration of Independence at first except for John Hancock. John was the President of the Continental Congress. He originally signed it on behalf of the entire congress. So his life was particularly on the line. The other signers didn't start signing it until after August. And the interesting thing about John Hancock, he probably had the most to lose. John was an extremely wealthy man – a great philanthropist and nine-term Governor of Massachusetts. So here he is, very rich and really important – ready to possibly give it all up and face hanging. That was all secondary to John Hancock. In his opinion, why hide the fact that you want freedom for yourself and your family? You believe in a free country - you believe in freedom. John Hancock put it all on the line for us.

Freedom - what exactly is freedom? Are we free now? I mean, can we do anything at all we want? Of course not. We have laws and regulations that must be adhered to or there can be consequences. So what does freedom mean if we have to obey laws anyway?

I guess one way to define freedom would be that you get to make your own choices. You get to decide what you want to do and when you want to do it. You can choose what kind of job you want, if you want to change jobs, when you retire or even if you want to be unemployed. You can also decide which church to attend, and not be afraid to speak out for or against your government.

But, yes, there are general principals and laws that we need to live by that date back to the beginnings of our country. Most of these have been put down on paper by our forefathers.

I enjoy reading about our history. I like reading the old documents like Mayflower Compact, The Federalist Papers, Bill of Rights, Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address and the list goes on.

What I think is so interesting is how our forefathers, who wanted freedom, spoke about freedom, died for freedom, could have said anything at all they wanted to in these historical documents. Did you realize that most of these documents mention God?

Here is what 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 a Capital C) with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”

It goes on to say, “We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name, and by the authority of the good people of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right out to be Free and Independent States.

Wow – They could have said anything at all they wanted but they talked about rights that were given by the Creator – by God.

In the Old Testament reading Zelma read for us, wasn't Moses doing the same thing as John Hancock and the Continental Congress? They were a country living under a dictator – wanting their freedom. They wanted to be able to go and worship God.

Now with Moses, he used frogs – plus some other plagues – I'm not quite sure how the King of England would have responded to a wave of frogs hitting England. Since the Continental Congress didn't have Moses around, they just used their armies.

But Moses and the Israelites wanted the exact same thing that our forefathers wanted. Freedom. Through their belief in God, they were given freedom.

With God we all have freedom. We also have some general principals and laws that we need to live by or there can be consequences as well. The bible tells us that the punishment for sin is separation from God-or death. So what can we do? We are all sinners so does that mean we are all separated from God? Not at all. As we heard earlier from the Gospel reading, Jesus gives us freedom from our sins. He paid our debt for our sins and Jesus gives us freedom from all sins we have ever committed plus those we will commit. What does he ask for in return for such a gift? Faith. Faith in Him. Believe in Him. As we grow in our faith and our relationship with Jesus, we actually strive to sin less and less – but we will still sin – but we are still free from that sin.

Just like John Hancock believed in a new country, a free country, we need to believe in Jesus, trust in Jesus, sign our name next to the others before us - and prepare ourselves for a new life.

It is with this freedom that our forefathers died fighting for. So we can have the freedom to worship God when and where we want to. It is also for freedom Jesus died for us. Through his death we are free.

So today, on our Independence Day, let's celebrate those brothers and sisters of ours that have fallen before us and let's remember our savior, Jesus, that also fell for us. All so we can have Freedom and enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

It is this gift of freedom that we are reminded of and celebrate through Holy Communion.

Please follow along with the communion liturgy in your bulletin.

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