

“WHAT FREES US?”
JULY 2007

Are you getting prepared to celebrate the Fourth of July? It will be here sooner than you think. Every year, on this special date, we remember that famous document that was penned by Thomas Jefferson, *The Declaration of Independence*. This radical document boldly declared that liberty was a gift from God and not something granted by human governments.

The Bible has much to say about freedom. In the Gospels, Jesus speaks about our longing to be free and he reveals the path to true liberty. One of Jesus' best known teachings about freedom is found in the Gospel of John,

*“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples,
and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”*
(John 8:31-32)

Every time I read these words of Jesus, I am reminded of the universal human desire to be free. Men and women around the globe have this longing in their heart. The second half of this teaching of Jesus is the motto of the Venezuelan Presbyterian Church's school in Caracas, the Colegio Americano. Students had to memorize John 8:32 and were taught its significance.

This Presbyterian school was founded in 1896. Helen and I were there to help celebrate its centennial. Helen led the choir and taught Bible classes. I was the chaplain and served on the school's board. We had the joy of helping to plant a new church that met in the school's chapel. The Colegio Americano had about 700 students: from preschool through high school. Helen and I had daily contact with these students and their families. For all of them, the question of freedom was important. They valued the liberty to speak their mind and vote their preference.

Of course, the freedom mentioned by Jesus is more profound than the right to vote or the right of free speech. According to our Lord, the truth that he imparts will have the power to break the chains that bind our soul. So often we can become ensnared by our own vanity and pride. The powers of darkness can also blind us to the true light of the Gospel. The Risen Lord is able to free us from all that binds us in this essential part of our being.

The Fourth of July celebrates freedom. This date has been special for Americans for more than 200 years now. As you enjoy grilling or watching fireworks, take a moment to remember Jesus' words on the meaning of true freedom: freedom from all that binds us in this life and the next. Give thanks to God that this liberty is available to all who would follow Jesus.

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