



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“THE AUTHOR OF LIBERTY”

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 61:1-4; Mark 8:31-38

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, June 6, 2021  
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

Mark 8:31-38

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.’

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray...

Almighty and everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and meditations of each of our hearts be pleasing, acceptable, even joyful in your sight, for you are our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

On Monday our family went to Hampton Park for a Memorial Day concert; and, be it the singing of our national anthem, or the Charleston Concert Band’s playing of Stars and Stripes Forever... The various marches and show tunes, they helped us not only to celebrate America, but also reminded us of those brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice and gave their lives for the freedom and the liberty that is uniquely ours. At one point in the program, the band’s director, Basil Kerr, he took a moment to express something of the difference between freedom and liberty, and I thought it was helpful. In fact, it is a distinction that have been thinking about all week. I don’t know about you, but when I ponder the idea of freedom, I tend to think about the state of being free; free to speak, free to assemble, free to bear arms, free to worship. We are free to do a great many things; whereas, when I consider the idea of liberty, I tend to think more about the manner in which we live out our freedom.

To put it within a theological framework, I am reminded of the time when the Apostle Paul addressed the freedom that people had to eat the meat that had been previously used in sacrifices to idols. It was a topic about which the Scriptures were largely silent, and it is clear from the Bible that it really didn’t matter to Paul whether people ate the meat or not. “But

take care,” Paul says, “that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.” In other words, while believers were free to act according to their conscience in areas where God’s Word was otherwise silent, their actions, their liberty within that freedom, it was to always have the welfare of others in mind. Practically speaking, it is like wearing masks. Clearly, we are free to wear them or not; however, we hope that an unvaccinated person’s liberty not to wear them does not cause them harm or harm to someone else for that matter.

The great reformer Martin Luther, in his book entitled, *The Freedom of the Christian*, said “A Christian is the most free lord of all, and subject to none,” and yet Luther went on to say that “A Christian is [also] the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.” The pulpit giant Peter Marshall offered the following prayer on the floor of the US Senate: “Lord Jesus, thou art the Way, the Truth, and the Life; hear us as we pray for the truth shall make all free. Teach us that liberty is not only to be loved but also to be lived. Help us to see that our liberty is not the right to do as we please, but the opportunity to do what is right.” Of course, people like Martin Luther and Peter Marshall, they come to the ideas of freedom and liberty as Christians, which is another important distinction to make, because without the freedom that Christ provides, are we really free in the truest sense of the word?

In the movie, *The Truman Show*, Jim Carrey plays the role of Truman Burbank, a lovable fellow who the film presents to us as having been the first child in human history to be adopted by a company. And what the company did was to turn the entirety of Truman’s life into a television show, *The Truman Show*; and so, from the day Truman was born, the world watched! It watched as Truman took his first steps, it watched as he attended his first day of school, it watched as he lost his first tooth. Cameras were everywhere, all over his house, all over the town, which really was not as much a town as it was an enormous set. A fully-functional and self-sustaining set, complete with buildings and trees and people. Hundreds and hundreds of people, all of them employed by the company. Within this grand production nearly every aspect of Truman’s life was managed. From his neighbors across the street who gathered outside their home nearly every morning to greet him, and to whom Truman would always offer his famous greeting: “And in case I don’t see you, good afternoon, good evening and good night.” Oh, from the fake rain that would fall from the invisible dome above to the rising of the remote, controlled sun to its setting, everything was carefully staged. It was choreographed to perfection. It doesn’t take long to realize that, for Truman Burbank, though he thinks he has freedom, he actually has none. And the sad reality is that that’s the story of a great many people living in the world today. For theirs is a world that is comprised only of what they see, and what they see gives them the false impression that they are in control, that they are somehow free to say and do as they please.

Oh, we’d like to think that our life is so full; oh, but friends, have we not learned that a life lived apart from Jesus Christ is a manufactured freedom? Oh, there is liberty, but to what end? When we say, “If the Son sets [us] free, [we] will be free indeed” (John 8:36) or when we affirm, as we did in this morning’s Call to Worship, that “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17) when the Bible instructs us to speak that way and to believe that way, it is for us to know in our hearts that, by God’s grace, we can, in fact, be set free! But set free from what?

Set free from relationships that are propped up and artificial. That's what! Set free from a world that is all-too-often a fabrication of what God intends for our life and the lives of others! Set free to see the world rightly, but only when our blinders are removed, only when we are truly set free! Notice how Jesus talks about our freedom in this morning's New Testament Lesson. Jesus says: "If any want to be my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Isn't it amazing that in a kind of upside-down divine logic God effectively tells us that we are never more free than when we are bound to Christ. That we are, in fact, the greatest when we are servants. And here in Mark's Gospel, Jesus tells us that that in order to save our life we must be willing to lose it; if he tells us that we are ever going to be our truest selves then we will need to deny ourselves. For years upon years the world waited for the Messiah to come, and for years upon years God's people had been subject to the wages of sin, which are death; and before Jesus, those wages were like chains that could not be broken. But when Jesus came, our reconciliation with God was made possible. Life and life abundant was made possible as never before! And God was and is able to do this, able to change our lives and give us meaning and purpose, not because God is the creator of some movie set with great big light bulbs made to look like stars, orchestrating our every move. No! God is the one who created the world out of nothing. He is the one who placed the actual stars in the sky, and it is none other than God, our good Shepard, who gives us the freedom to live and move and have our being. What's more, in Jesus Christ God has given unto us a profound liberty, a liberty which allows us, by grace through faith, to remove the yoke of sin that we wear, to break free from its bondage and to live as we were designed to live! That is the truth of the Gospel and it is the amazing message that God has given us to share with the world!

Thinking back on the movie, *The Truman Show*, I recall how it was that there were a number of people who watched the show and who perceived what they saw as an injustice. Knowing that Truman was unaware of what was really happening, they tried repeatedly to trespass/break onto the set, in order to tell Truman the truth. To help him differentiate between the real and the phony! It happened that the actor who played the role of Truman's father was one of those people, and so what the tv producers did was to kill that character off by making it appear as though he had drowned. And though that was all a part of an elaborate scheme to keep Truman in the dark, Truman experienced it as real and that experience was used throughout his life to keep Truman in check, to keep him from venturing too far. In a dramatic and final scene, the producers pull out all of the stops, make-believe thunder and lightning, engines pumping the water back and forth, making what Truman thought was the ocean as treacherous as he had ever seen it. But Truman is determined to sail on and eventually he gets to the edge of the set. He comes to what had been for him the edge of the horizon and he sees the dome and he sees a staircase with an exit sign overhead. As Truman makes his way to the door the producer, in a last-ditch effort to keep Truman on the set, he calls to him from the loudspeakers above, "I can hear you," Truman says, "Who are you?" I am the creator of a television show that gives hope and joy and inspiration to millions of people. "Then who am I?" "You were the star!" "Was nothing real?" "You were real. That's what made you so good to watch." The producer went on: "There's no more truth out there than there is in the world that I created for you, the same lies, the same deceit. But in my world, you have nothing to fear. Talk to me. Say something! Say something! You're on television. You're live to the whole world." After a dramatic pause, Truman gathered his senses, smiled and confidently said in his winsome way: "In case I don't see you. Good afternoon, good evening and good night!" And with that, he

took a bow and he walked through the door and he began a new day. A day unlike any other. A new day that would lead to a new life.

I wonder about the extent to which that story reflects our own story; because, until Jesus sets us free to love, we are slaves to sin and most of the time we don't even know it. And even when we do begin to understand God's claims upon our lives, we sometimes choose to live as if we don't want things to change. We get to the threshold of that door, which leads to a new life and we wonder if we want to open it, especially when things are going well and when it seems as though we have everything we need. Ah, if ever we feel like that, may the echoes of Jesus' encounter with Satan reverberate in our minds. "Look," the devil said, "This is my world and I can give it to whomever I please. All that you see can be yours, if you but fall down and worship me." Jesus was free to do that. He was free to live his life on the world's terms and to see the world from the devil's perspective, but that was not the world of God's design; that was not the truest representation of God's kingdom; and that was certainly not the meaning and the purpose which had been assigned to Jesus as the Son of God.

In our New Testament Lesson this morning Jesus put it this way, "For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?" And the answer is, "Nothing!" Oh, praise be to God that, in the end, Jesus chose not to yield to temptation. Oh, he was free to do so, alright, but Jesus understood his freedom rightly, and he understood it as the opportunity to do the will of his Father in heaven! And we are free to do that as well, free to obey God, free to deny ourselves, free to take up our cross and follow Jesus, for that is the nature of true and holy freedom, and ours is the liberty, if not the responsibility, to live into that freedom and to help others to do the same.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.