

**JUNE 29, 2019 by JOHN TSCHUDY**

**SCRIPTURE LESSONS GALATIANS 5:13-25, LUKE 9:51-62**

When the Apostle Paul says that we are “Called to freedom” he is talking about being set free from the strict obedience to the old Jewish Laws as they had come to be interpreted in the time of Jesus. Without the restrictions of the law, Paul worries about the people replacing them with the “wisdom” of the world and people becoming self-centered and people being ruled by the desires of greed, power, or ruled by their fears rather than the love of God. Thomas Jefferson saw the same danger existing in the world after America won the Revolutionary War and adopted the style of government we have. Jefferson saw a real danger for the American people using their freedoms in irresponsible ways. Just as Paul sees the danger in the people being set free from the fixed laws of the religion of that day. For Paul there is a real danger for people to ignore the personal responsibility that comes along with the kind of freedom that both Christ and our system of government offers to people. Again we come back to the point that God has given to us the Holy Spirit to guide us. But we are free to ignore it and if we do and we allow the world to rule our lives we risk not only sinning before God but also doing great harm to ourselves and the world around us, as well as others.

In many of the founders minds, our system of government will work best when people put serving the nation and others first, not their own self-interest. Being a patriot is to put the needs of the country first, not ourselves. Remember when JFK called on the American People to ask what we could do for the country, rather than insist that the country does something for us. How would our political, economic and social life change if we put love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control as the guiding factors of our life’s decisions as individuals and a nation? Being a Christian is more about how we follow the teachings of Jesus, then where we go to church, the rituals we follow and the symbols we display. The same goes for being a patriotic American. The freedoms we are proclaimed to have of things like Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness gain their real importance from how we use them and share them more than anything else.

Here’s an easy question. In our Gospel lesson which is the Christian response to the village that denies Jesus entry because he is headed for Jerusalem, James and John or Jesus? I submit that the mood in America today is more in keeping with James and John and is a common response in the world today. Too often we tend to lash out at those that disagree with us and what we want, rather than accepting that as their right. Even worse we often demand that they give in to us, while we refuse to help them or be concerned about them. As Paul reminds us Jesus commands that we treat others the way we want to be treated and love others as we love ourselves. Again Jesus points out that sometimes being a follower of his carries with it some inconvenience because being a follower of Christ requires that being Christ’s disciple to be the most important thing in our lives. Again this is true for both Christians and Patriots. Politicians on all sides know that to be elected they must make people think that their platform is in their personal best interest, even if it isn’t in the best interests of the country or follow moral teachings. That’s just the way the human mind works. But both our Faith and love of country should make us put what is best for others and the country first and trust that it will help us also.

Jesus is calling on us in the Gospel Lesson to do the same thing JFK asked all Americans to do all those years ago. We are to put following God, as the Holy Spirit leads us first in our lives. The old version of “America the Beautiful” defined a Patriot as someone who “More than self, their country loves.” In our personal lives what comes first, serving God, serving the country, or giving in to our personal wants and fears, desires above all else? The important question of life we must all ask ourselves this Fourth of July and every other day is how are we using the Freedoms we have been given by God and the sacrifices of others? What is the driving force for decision making in our lives, our personal self-interest or the Holy Spirit? What does Love of Country mean to us and how do we best express it? Both Paul and Thomas Jefferson warn us about the dangers of self-centered behavior over being concerned about others. What will be the basis of how we live our day to day lives as individuals and as a country?