

One thing that won't happen tomorrow on 4th of July, as the little girl asked her mother, “Why don't they ring the Liberty Bell anymore?” “Because there's a crack in it,” the mother answers.

You know the story, don't you: The Liberty Bell rang gloriously in July of 1776 to announce the signing of the Declaration of Independence, but it cracked and had to be recast.

Some 60 years later, as it tolled the death of Chief Justice John Marshall, it cracked again and has been silent ever since.

The little girl asks the right follow-up question, “Well, why don't they fix it?”

A friend of mine took a family vacation to Philadelphia, went to Independence Hall where the Declaration of Independence was voted on.

They walked over to the museum where the Liberty Bell is displayed, and my friend told me how he watched the people as they viewed this historic bell.

He said he noticed a constant theme in the conversations of those looking at the Liberty Bell: All of them were talking about the crack, and none seemed to notice the biblical text engraved on the bottom, from Leviticus 25:10, in our reading today: *Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.*

That seems to be a good picture of the American conversation. We are so preoccupied with the cracks, the chasms, the divides that break through society's terrain, that we don't see the call to action to repair the crack.

We know the way it should be. The preamble to the Declaration of Independence is absolutely inspiring, so easily understood: *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.*

It's that three-letter word ALL that defines our freedom, and it is our freedom that defines our nation.

We are painfully aware, though, that not even when those words were written did ALL mean ALL: slaves, women, those who didn't own property, native Americans were not included.

You see, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are nothing unless they are motivated by God's desire for justice, kindness, and humility for “all the inhabitants thereof.”

Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, wrote an essay that helps us understand the theological roots of our freedom.

He explains that Jewish law prohibited entering slavery voluntarily. To put it another way, he makes the point: Every person was free, but no person was free to give up his or her freedom.

Wiesel is saying that God has created us to be free. God expects us to maintain that freedom at all costs.

We need to remember the words of Roger Williams, who established religious freedom in what is now Rhode Island, "I commend that man, whether Jew, or Turk, or Papist, or whoever, that steers no otherwise than his conscience dares," said Roger Williams.

In other words, freedom.

Jon Meacham, the historian, speaks to this. "As crucial as religion has been and is to the life of the nation," he says, "America's unifying force has never been a specific faith, but a commitment to freedom..."

So, as we celebrate our freedom as citizens of this great country, let us consider our freedom in light of God's word, gathered around this table.

Martin Luther, in his essay titled "Concerning Christian Liberty," made this bold assertion: *A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.*

There's that word again, "ALL..."

But the crack in the Liberty Bell is all too real, and so many seem to be working so hard to widen the crack, deepening the chasm that separates, fearful wedge by

fearful wedge splitting us further and further apart.

Scott Peck contended that it is our rugged individualism in America, our image of the self-made success that pits us against one another and has actually made us a very lonely people.

Consider those in this country, this world, who have no peace: the anxious, the frightened, the neglected, those ravaged by war, those whose way of life has been wrecked by natural disaster, disease, the hungry, the homeless, the jobless...

And as we come to this table that we say is open to all, we need to take an extra hard look at those who are not allowed, for some invisible reason, but for many, very visible reasons, not allowed to, not able to enjoy the freedoms of this great nation because they are being pushed out of the definition of ALL because we spell it M – E, ME.

The freedom that I hear so many demanding in these days is not really freedom. It's more of a tantrum of self-indulgent, shortsighted childish impulses that does not serve anyone but themselves, a self-centered trivial purpose.

Freedom finds its true worth in the purpose freedom serves.

Listen again to Paul's words to the Galatians, "You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become servants to one another" (Galatians 5:13).

Craig Watts makes the point: “Real freedom is not found in simply doing what we want to do without regard to others. Rather, real freedom is found as we do what is for the good of others.”

A life lived in genuine freedom is a life lived that others might flourish.

I had the distinct honor a few weeks ago of spending a week with youth from our church at the Montreat Youth Conference.

The theme was “More Than Enough”: God gives us more than enough, we are each in our own way more than enough, and we have more than enough, and all people should have enough to live freely as God’s creatures.

They were challenged to live that truth, to live that others may flourish, more than enough.

In listening to them, their hopes, their concerns, their dreams, their fears – I was challenged by their honesty, their sense of justice, and their growing faith as to how I was living that truth; and I believe the church needs to listen and be challenged by them to live that truth, to live that others may flourish.

You see, real freedom is not found merely in the act of choosing but in choosing well. And we only choose well when our choices are made so that life might thrive, not only our own life, but the lives of those around us as well: More than enough, freedom for all.

It is crucial that we understand the importance of how we as a community of faith are shaping the values, the choices, for our youth, for anyone and everyone who is served the free grace of God at this table.

We drink from the cup of salvation, eat the bread of life, and when you and I live with a sense that our words and our actions have communion consequences, we live to love people, not exploit them.

We live to protect people from being oppressed by the greed and prejudices and violence of unloving people.

We live to challenge prideful and powerful people who would use us as their tools, who would incite us to act towards others in unloving, unjust ways, or to put it in terms of the Lord’s Supper, what choices are we making that give more people a space at this table?

Let me put it this way: Repairing the crack in the Liberty Bell requires the glue of generosity, mindful that the love of God demands justice, and the truth of God condemns injustice.

When we live as people of God's love and truth, truly we will *“Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.”*

All the inhabitants!

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.